

1993

Transformative experiences of female adult students

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Transformative experiences of female adult students

by

Maria Renate Vogelsang

A Dissertation Submitted to the

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**Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa**

1993

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the problem statement, the research questions, and the significance of the study are presented. Further, the assumptions underlying the study are outlined and definitions of central concepts of the study are given.

Problem Statement

The mission of higher education is often defined as promoting growth and development of the learners (Sanford, 1966; Knefelkamp, 1974; Weathersby, 1980; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Parks, 1983). However, what is meant by the terms "growth" and "development" in this context is rarely specified.

Mezirow (1991) offers a theoretical framework, called transformative theory, that may help to improve our understanding of the concepts growth and development. Mezirow (1991) defines development as the progressively enhanced capacity to critically reflect on deeply held meaning perspectives and to act upon the resulting insights. Anything that helps an individual to arrive at a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated framework of meaning perspectives is considered beneficial to an individual's development. The process of becoming aware of the context and origin of one's meaning perspectives, of critically reflecting on them, of changing them to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative meaning perspective, and finally of acting on the new meaning perspective, is called perspective transformation. Thus, according to Mezirow, facilitating growth and development translates into facilitating perspective transformation or transformative learning. Consequently, to meet its goal of facilitating growth and development, higher education must provide students with opportunities to become aware of their meaning perspectives, to critically examine their meaning perspectives, to consider alternative meaning perspectives, and to act on the insights gained from this critical reflection process.

Not much research has been done investigating whether the educational experiences of students in higher education are of transformative nature and thus contribute to the growth and development of the learners. The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to examine whether the educational experiences of

students in higher education are transformative; secondly, to investigate what kinds of educational activities are helpful in promoting transformative learning.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were:

- Are the educational experiences of students in higher education transformative experiences?
- What kinds of educational activities stimulate transformative learning in students?

Significance of the Study

The study was expected to identify whether the educational experiences of students in higher education are transformative experiences; that is, the study was expected to identify whether their educational experiences helped students to become aware of the context and origin of their meaning perspectives, to reflect critically on their meaning perspectives, to consider alternative meaning perspectives, and to act upon insights gained from the critical reflection process. Investigating the transformative nature of the educational experiences of students helps to assess the effects higher education has on the growth and development of the learners. Educational experiences that stimulate transformative learning in the students are expected to contribute to the growth and development of the students. Educational experiences that do not stimulate transformative learning in the students do not attain the goal of facilitating growth and development of the students. In addition, identifying educational activities that promote transformative learning can assist in planning and implementing educational programs aimed at promoting growth and development of the learners.

Assumptions Underlying the Study

The mission of higher education is to facilitate personal growth and development of the learners. Development is understood as the progressively enhanced ability of critically reflecting on meaning perspectives and acting upon the gained insights (Mezirow, 1991). Thus for higher education to fulfill its mission of facilitating personal growth and development, higher education must

offer students opportunities to become aware of their meaning perspectives, to critically reflect on their meaning perspectives, to consider alternative meaning perspectives, and to act on the insights gained from this critical reflection process.

Definitions

Central concepts used in this study are defined as:

Adult students: Adult students are undergraduate students 25 years of age or older.

Traditional undergraduate students: Traditional undergraduate students are undergraduate students who are younger than 25 years of age.

Educational experiences: Educational experiences are all the in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences that are connected with attending an institution of higher education. Examples of educational experiences include attending seminars, lectures, conferences, cultural events, carrying out lab work, engaging in reading, discussions, preparing home work assignments, interacting with faculty, staff and other students, being a member or leader of student and campus organizations, and working on campus.

Meaning perspectives: Meaning perspectives are the set of habitual expectations and assumptions that represent an orienting frame of reference which people use to interpret and evaluate the meaning of new experiences.

Meaning schemes: A meaning scheme is the particular knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that become articulated in an interpretation. Each meaning perspective contains a number of meaning schemes.

Transformative learning or perspective transformation: Transformative learning or perspective transformation refers to the process of becoming aware of one's meaning perspectives, of critically reflecting upon one's meaning perspectives, of exploring alternative meaning perspectives, of restructuring one's meaning perspectives, and of taking actions based on the insights gained from this process.

Critical reflection: Critical reflection means to examine the validity of one's meaning perspectives.

Validity testing: Validity testing is the process of assessing the reasons and supportive arguments for one's meaning perspectives and of evaluating whether these meaning perspectives are still justified under present circumstances.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter theories and research related to the personal growth process will be discussed. First, statements regarding the mission of higher education will be presented and analyzed. Then, developmental theories and transformative theories that clarify the concept of personal growth are presented. Similarities and differences between developmental and transformative theories are elaborated on and discussed. Adult students - undergraduate students 25 years of age and older - served as the population for this study. For this reason it will be specified what personal growth and what facilitating personal growth means with regard to adult students. Finally, former research on the influence of higher education on the growth and development of students will be synthesized.

Mission of Higher Education

The mission of higher education is often described as facilitating the growth and development of the learner. For example, Weathersby (1980) asserts that higher education has to provide an academic context that supports developmental activities. Maslow (1976) states that the goal of education is to help people become the best they are capable of becoming. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) indicate that the task of education is to help people grow and evolve more fully in the realization of their potential. Education can be considered a way to assist an individual in becoming a "mature personality." Knefelkamp (1974) mentions that higher education should promote the development of the whole human being, and Sanford (1966) argues that the proper role of higher education is to foster individual development.

As can be seen from these statements the mission of higher education is often described in very broad and abstract terms. It has rarely been specified what is meant by the terms growth and development. If definitions of the terms "growth" and "development" are given they are mostly derived from developmental theories in psychology.

Theoretical Frameworks of the Growth and Development Process

Psychologists have introduced different developmental theories to describe the process of personal growth and development. Recently, Mezirow (1991) suggested transformative theory as an alternative framework for explaining the personal growth process. Following is an overview of developmental theories. Transformative theories are then presented, and the differences and similarities between developmental and transformative theories are discussed.

Developmental theories

Developmental psychologists suggest different theories of adult development. Theories of development identify commonalities or orderly patterns of development that exist for all human beings as they move through life while at the same time being aware of individual differences and unique responses to life events or tasks among any group of people (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). The adult life can be divided into stages rooted in the biological, psychological, and social nature of adult human beings (Aslanian, 1989). Cross (1981) divides developmental theories into theories based on life cycle phases and theories based on developmental stages. Life cycle phases are linked to age. Models based on life cycle phases identify relationships between age and general orientations, problems, developmental tasks, personal concerns, or other adult characteristics. Each age level has to deal with a set of broadly defined tasks. Life cycle phases do not imply a hierarchy. They are viewed as horizontal instead of vertical (Chickering, 1975; Weathersby & Tarule, 1980; Merriam, 1984; Boucouvalas & Krupp, 1990). Examples of theories based on life cycle phases are the work of Sheehy (1976), Gould (1978), Havighurst (1972), Levinson et al. (1978), Buehler (1962), and Neugarten (1968).

Developmental stages are hierarchical sequences of development. Thus, in contrast to models based on life-cycle phases, developmental stage theories assume a vertical instead of a horizontal movement in development. Each level represents a qualitatively different frame of reference, which is used to respond to and learn from one's experiences. Every developmental stage is characterized by a certain pattern of motivation and cognition, and by certain conceptions of knowledge, authority, and responsibility for learning. The movement to the next higher level involves a reorganization of intellect, emotion, and even personality.

Higher levels of development represent a more complex, more differentiated, more mature state. The stages are maturational and epigenetic; that is, each stage has a modifying influence on all later stages (Knefelkamp, 1974; Weathersby & Tarule, 1980). Examples of theories based on developmental stages are the work of Erikson (1950), Jung (1971), Piaget (1952), Loevinger (1976), Kohlberg (1969), Perry (1970), and Heath (1968).

Transformative theories

Different formulations of transformative theory can be found in the literature. Two formulations which are promising within the field of adult education are Boyd and Myers' (1988) transformative education and Mezirow's (1991) perspective transformation. Boyd and Myers' (1988) transformative education developed out of Jung's (1971) work, especially his concept of individuation. Mezirow's (1991) perspective transformation incorporates a wide variety of philosophical and theoretical frameworks: adult development, especially from Chiensky, Piaget, and Kohlberg; Habermas's communicative action; thoughts on the process of learning from Bateson, Cell, and Popper; and ideas of constructivism, critical theory, and deconstructivism in social theory, and in all of the social sciences, as well as in law, literature, and art (Mezirow, 1991).

Although Boyd and Myers' (1988) and Mezirow's (1991) formulations of transformation theory differ in their foundation, they both emphasize that a significant change within an individual involves awareness, examination, and reorganization of deeply held values, beliefs, and assumptions. Boyd and Myers' (1988) transformative education stresses the significance of affective, intuitive, and extrarational elements - symbols, images, and feelings - for personal transformation, whereas Mezirow's (1991) perspective transformation puts more emphasis on rational, cognitive elements.

Since most activities in higher education are targeted more toward rational, cognitive elements and less toward affective, intuitive, extrarational elements, it is expected that the learning experiences of the students may be more of a rational, cognitive nature. For this reason Mezirow's (1991) formulation of transformative theory seems to be more likely to capture personal growth processes stimulated by educational activities provided by higher education than does Boyd and Myers' (1988) formulation of transformation theory. Thus Mezirow's (1991) formulation

of transformative theory will be used as the theoretical basis for this study. However, this is not to say that affective, intuitive, extrarational elements are less significant for the personal growth process. Both rational and extrarational elements are equally important for personal growth and development.

Since Mezirow's (1991) transformative theory will be used as the theoretical basis for this study his theory will be introduced in the following section. However, the reader is encouraged to study Boyd and Myers' (1988) formulation of transformative theory as well, to gain a more complete understanding of rational and extrarational processes in transformative learning.

Mezirow's perspective transformation

Mezirow (1991) differentiates two dimensions of making meaning: meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. "A meaning scheme is the particular knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that become articulated in an interpretation" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 44). Meaning perspectives consist of the set of habitual expectations and assumptions that represent an orienting frame of reference which people use to interpret and evaluate the meaning of experiences. Meaning perspectives offer criteria for judging right and wrong, bad and good, true and false. They also determine our self-image, the way we feel about ourselves. Each meaning perspective contains a number of meaning schemes. For example, specific racial and sexual stereotypes are meaning schemes. The meaning perspective that is underlying these meaning schemes is ethnocentrism, the basic suspicion of others different from oneself or one's group. Meaning schemes can be changed through content reflection (reflection on *what* we perceive, think, feel, or act upon) and process reflection (reflection on *how* we perform the functions of perceiving, thinking, feeling or acting). Meaning perspectives can be changed through premise reflection (reflection on *why* we perceive, think, feel, or act as we do). For example, deciding that "women are able to hold public offices" involves content reflection. Process reflection refers to the way in which we concluded from different incidents that "women are able to hold public offices." Finally, premise reflection means to examine the reasons that made us arrive at the conclusion that "women are able to hold public offices." In premise reflection we critically examine whether the arguments that support our assumption "women are able to hold public offices" are valid.

A change in a meaning perspective entails a change in the meaning schemes that are derived from the meaning perspective. When we realize that our arguments underlying the assumption "women are able to hold public offices" are not valid, the assumption "women are able to hold public offices" becomes invalid. Thus a premise reflection is always combined with a content reflection and a process reflection. On the other hand, a content reflection or process reflection does not necessarily include a premise reflection.

Mezirow (1991) indicates that a change in meaning schemes may occur in the form of instrumental learning or communicative learning. A change in meaning perspective represents emancipatory learning. Instrumental learning, communicative learning, and emancipatory learning are the three learning domains of cognitive interest. Instrumental learning refers to the process of learning to control and manipulate the environment and other people. The domain of instrumental learning centers on determining cause-effect relationships and learning through task-oriented problem solving. Instrumental learning means learning how to do something or how to perform. Examples of instrumental learning are learning how to do certain calculations, how to develop a budget, and how to write chemical equations.

The domain of communicative learning focuses on learning to understand the meaning of what others communicate and to make ourselves understood. Further communicative learning includes learning the conditions under which an assertion is valid. Examples for communicative learning are improving one's listening skills, learning how to develop and give a speech, and learning how to write a journal article (Mezirow, 1991).

Finally, emancipatory learning is the learning domain of perspective transformation. Through emancipatory learning an individual gains self-knowledge and frees himself/herself from misconceptions, ideologies, and psychological distortions that limit his/her options and control his/her life (Mezirow, 1981). Similarly, Mezirow (1991) defines "perspective transformation" as "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings" (p. 167). A perspective

transformation can be triggered by an externally imposed traumatic event in the life of a person, such as a death, illness, divorce, or being passed over for promotion. A perspective transformation can also be initiated by an eye-opening discussion, book, or poem, or by moving to a different culture. In general, a perspective transformation can be evoked by experiences, often in an emotionally charged situation, that do not fit our expectations and consequently lack meaning for us. To make meaning of the new experience and to integrate it within one's meaning perspectives an internal change is required. For this change to take place the validity of currently held perspectives must be established. Validity testing means to assess the reasons and supporting arguments for our perspectives and to evaluate whether our perspectives are still justified under the current situation. Validity testing is done through critical reflection and public discourse. As people try to validate their perspectives they may realize how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions dictates the way in which they see, think, feel, and act. Individuals may identify their currently held meaning perspectives as distorted, inauthentic, or otherwise unjustified. To validate their mental constructs people add to, extend, or change the structure of their meaning perspectives. An old meaning perspective may be negated in favor of a new one, or an old and a new meaning perspective may be synthesized. The negation or transformation of inadequate, false, distorted, or limited meaning perspectives is the central element of adult learning. Mezirow (1991, pp. 168-169) suggests that perspective transformation or adult learning consists of ten phases:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning of a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

To clarify Mezirow's (1991) transformative theory further, the example of a person experiencing a perspective transformation will be given in the following discussion. Let's take the example of Ann, whose life has been centered around her husband and her children. Recently, the children spend less and less time at home. Realizing that her children do not need her as much as they did when they were small, Ann feels empty and restless (disorienting dilemma). One of her friends recommends that she goes back to school and finish the degree which Ann had barely started before she got married and dropped out of school. Ann follows the advice and enrolls in college. Ann finds college life exciting, but at the same time she feels guilty for not being there for her family all the time. Tim, her husband, recently complained that dinner wasn't ready when he came home from work, and Jessica, her daughter, was disappointed that Mom did not accompany her to the school concert (self-examination with feelings of guilt and shame). On the other hand, conversations with her college friends and also the readings of her women's study class make Ann question her role as wife and mother. Ann ponders questions such as: What does it mean to be a mother and wife? Does it mean to put all other family members first? Who am I? Am I completely defined by being a mother and wife, or is there more to me? Why do I feel guilty because I want to finish my college degree? Couldn't Tim accompany Jessica to the play? (critical assessment of assumptions).

Ann spends the time between classes in the adult students' center. There she often talks with other adult students about the questions occupying her mind and realizes that her female colleagues struggle with similar issues as she does (recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared; public discourse). Together, the women try to explore the kinds of expectations they and their families connect with the role of mother and wife and the origin of these expectations. Further, the women discuss whether these expectations are justified (public discourse; validity testing). After having thought about her role as mother and wife for some months, Ann decides that she wants to get to know other sides of herself. She decides that she will join the labor force after she completes school and explores different career options (exploration of options for new roles). Ann decides on becoming a physical therapist. The following semester she declares her major and together with her adviser she plans her course work for

the following college years. At the same time she applies for internships at offices of local physical therapists (planning a course of action).

In the ensuing years Ann completes her bachelor's degree and starts working part-time at the office of a local physical therapist. Although her family has a hard time in understanding Ann's desire to join the work force, Ann sticks to her decision (acquisition of knowledge and skills and provisional trying of new roles). As years go by Ann decides to open her own office (building of competence and self-confidence in new roles). A hospital in Minneapolis (four hours drive from home) makes Ann an offer to work for it. Ann is tempted to accept the offer. However, this would mean she would see her family only during the weekend. Since spending time with her family is important for Ann, she decides to forgo this option. Working independently as a physical therapist makes it possible for Ann to have flexible working hours, and thus Ann can spend as much time as she wants with her family and friends. At the same time, using her professional skills has become an important source of satisfaction for Ann (reintegration of the new role into one's life).

It is important to note that the story described is only an example. Not every perspective transformation has to follow this pattern. Ann might have decided as well that she will finish her degree but not join the labor force. As in the example above, Ann might have become aware of the expectations she herself and her family connect with being a mother and wife and of the origin of these expectations. Likewise Ann might have decided that these expectations are not justified. However, Ann knows that her husband and her children would like her to stay at home as long as the children are still in school. Considering all aspects, Ann decides to give in to the wishes of her family and to postpone her entry into the work force for the two years remaining during which her children will still come home every day. In this alternative case, Ann still became aware of her expectations and their origin and critically reflected on them. However, the action she took was different.

The main point of perspective transformation or transformative learning is to realize how one's currently held perspectives are influenced by culturally defined rules and how this influence constrains one's actions. Based on this insight one may restructure currently held perspectives and take actions based on the new

perspectives. What kinds of action will be taken depends on the newly developed perspective and cannot be predicted in advance.

Mezirow (1991) suggests that the process of perspective transformation can be divided into the ten phases that were illustrated using the example of Ann. At another place Mezirow (1991, p. 161) describes perspective transformation as involving "an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one's beliefs and feelings, a critique of their (...) premises, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new, an ability to fit the new perspective into the broader context of one's life." Based on this definition, the following elements of perspective transformation can be distinguished: becoming aware of one's perspective, questioning one's perspective, exploring alternative perspectives, revising one's perspective and acting on the new perspective. These elements of perspective transformation can be thought of as occurring in a sequence starting with "becoming aware of one's perspective" (Figure 1). The awareness of one's meaning perspective and the examination of one's meaning perspective are triggered by a disorienting dilemma. The perspective transformation is completed as soon as the person acts on the new perspective.

Developmental theories and Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation have been introduced as frameworks that try to shed light on the process of growth and development. In the following section, similarities and differences between developmental theories and Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation will be discussed.

Developmental theories and perspective transformation

Theories of adult development and Mezirow's (1991) formulation of transformative theory share common elements. Like developmental theories, transformative theory sees adulthood as a changing, fluctuating phenomenon (Boucoulalas & Krupp, 1990). Both developmental theories and transformative theory assume that individuals have deep-seated and basic ways to create meaning and maintain coherence in life - a frame of reference. This frame of reference, or meaning perspective, results from an interaction between the individual and the environment. The resulting structures are fairly stable and resistant to change. The process of development involves changing these inner

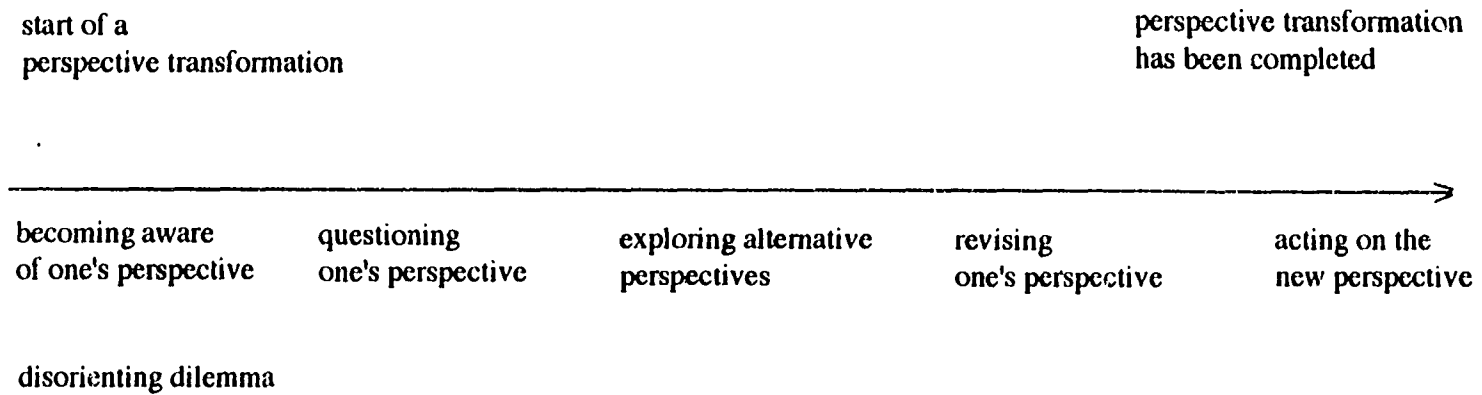


Figure 1: Process of perspective transformation based on Mezirow (1991)

structures (Tarule & Weathersby, 1979). Transformative theory seems to have more in common with developmental stage theories than with models of life-cycle phases. Both transformative theory and developmental stage theories imply a vertical movement in development; that is, further developed meaning perspectives, or higher stages of development, are preferable since they are characterized by a more inclusive, differentiated, integrated, permeable, complex, and thus more realistic, view of the world. Both transformative theory and developmental stage theories describe the change of a meaning perspective or developmental stage as a process of reorganization or restructuring.

Developmental stage theories assume that the movement from one stage to another stage involves a reorganization of intellect, emotion, and even personality. Similarly, transformative theory suggests that arriving at more differentiated, integrated, inclusive, and permeable meaning perspectives requires a restructuring of previously held meaning perspectives. Both transformative theory and developmental stage theories assume that development is irreversible; that is, once a person has arrived at a higher developmental stage or reached a more differentiated and integrated meaning perspective he/she will not regress to a lower stage or meaning perspective. At first sight, these similarities make transformative theory appear to be one other developmental stage theory. However, a more thorough comparison makes clear that there are significant differences between transformative theory and developmental stage theories.

First, developmental stage theories divide the developmental journey into clearly identifiable stages. Transformative theory, on the other hand, simply indicates that meaning perspectives become increasingly differentiated and integrated without specifying certain stages. The argument that humans develop in a stage like manner has been questioned by Favell (1982), Kagan (1982), and Kuhn (1983). These authors believe that "there may be predictable, orderly sequences of experience in adulthood rather than inclusive, shared internal or external structures" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 151). In addition, the degree to which developmental theories can be applied to cultural subgroups and women has been debated. This concern is justified since many of the models were developed from a small data base consisting of white, middle-class, male samples. A further difference between developmental stage models and transformative learning is that developmental stage models simply describe the different stages but do not

explain the movement from one stage to another. The strength of transformative theory, on the other hand, is that it seeks to explain how adult learners reformulate meanings, that is, how they move from one meaning perspective to another.

In conclusion, Mezirow's transformative theory has much in common with developmental stage theories. However, in contrast to developmental stage theories, transformative theory does not prescribe a specific hierarchy of developmental stages which persons have to pass through on their personal growth journey. Even more importantly, developmental stage theories describe stages of development but do not explain the process of moving from one stage to another. The main goal of transformative theory, on the other hand, is to explain how people move from one meaning perspective to another. Thus, unlike developmental stage theories, transformative theory explains the phenomenon of development itself.

Former research on the transformative process

The view that personal transformations play a significant role in personal growth in adulthood is supported by many authors (Ferguson, 1980; Parks, 1983; Brookfield, 1985; Keane, 1985; Daloz, 1986; Usher, 1986; Anderson & Sabatelli, 1990; Billington, 1990; Rannells, 1990). The process of transformation has been explored in different settings. Using seven ethnographic case studies, Musgrove (1977) examined the change of consciousness through the experience of marginality. Keane (1985) undertook a phenomenological analysis of his own transformation and those of five other men who belong to a religious community. Morgan (1987) confirmed Mezirow's (1991) phases of transformation in her study of thirty displaced homemakers who had become separated or divorced or had suffered the death of a spouse, and were involved in a college program especially designed for them. Brooks (1989) tried to find out whether critical reflection can change an organization. Young (1988) investigated whether the learning by twenty mothers participating in a series of postpartum classes is transformative in nature. Hough (1990) studied transformative learning within the context of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Jung (1971) does not use the terms "adult development" or "transformative learning." However, his concept of individuation represents the basis from which

Boyd and Myers (1988) developed their theory of personal transformation. Individuation refers to the "process of bringing into consciousness the unconscious contents of the mind thereby facilitating their differentiation and ultimately their integration" (O'Connor, 1985, p. 74). Some studies were done exploring progress in individuation. Rannells (1990) studied the influence of deity images upon the individuation of women who were enrolled in a women's studies class. Wilson and Knapp (1991) investigated the relationship between self-directed learning projects and progress toward individuation.

Several researchers (Ferguson, 1980; Loder, 1981; Brammer & Abrego, 1981; Keane, 1985; Brookfield, 1987) developed models of transformation. Comparing these models to each other and to the models developed by Mezirow (1991) and Boyd and Myers (1988), common elements can be identified. The initial phase is always some kind of disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). Keane (1985) speaks of disorientation, Brookfield (1987) of a trigger event, Brammer and Abrego (1981) of a shock, Loder (1981) of a conscious conflict, and Boyd and Myers (1988) of panic. The initial feelings of disorientation are followed by a period of self-assessment or self-examination (Ferguson, 1980; Mezirow, 1991), appraisal (Brookfield, 1987), letting go (Brammer & Abrego, 1981), or pause (Loder, 1981). Then the search and exploration of new options and meanings starts (Brammer & Abrego, 1981; Loder, 1981; Keane, 1985; Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991). Finally, the new or revised meaning perspectives are integrated into the person's life (Ferguson, 1980; Brammer, 1981; Loder, 1981; Keane, 1985; Brookfield, 1987; Boyd & Myers, 1988).

These researchers share also the conviction that transformations are periods of emotional upheaval. During the process of transformation, persons have to struggle with two opposing forces: one which tries to maintain the status quo at all costs and another which tries to change the present status. Due to this inner struggle transformation or personal growth is a process of strong emotions and feelings. Giving up or reintegrating "old" perspectives is connected with inner tension, disorientation, fear, and anxiety (Gould, 1978; Greenberg, 1980; Brammer & Abrego, 1981; Kegan, 1982; Parks, 1983; Bullnow, 1987; Boyd & Myers, 1988; Mezirow, 1991). Examining one's perspectives is frightening since our identities consist more truly of our perspectives than of our bodies (Ferguson, 1980). Thus it requires emotional strength, courage, will-power, and support to move forward

(Keane, 1985; Boyd & Myers, 1988; Mezirow, 1991). However, at the end of a positive transformation waits a reward: Those who complete a process of transformation or personal growth experience a feeling of rebirth, of a new beginning (Mezirow, 1991), and of a freeing up of one's internal life (Loder, 1981; Kegan, 1982).

Personal Growth and Adult Students

Adult students - undergraduate students who are 25 years of age or older - may be more likely to be engaged in transformative learning than traditional undergraduate students for the following reasons. First, an individual's capacity to engage in critical reflection is fully developed only in adulthood (Mezirow et al., 1990). Mezirow does not indicate a specific age when adulthood is reached, probably for a good reason since the ability for critical reflection may depend less on a person's age itself than on a person's experiences. Thus one person may be able to reflect critically on his/her perspectives by age 20, whereas another person may not be able to engage in critical reflection by age 40. However, older people tend to have more experiences than younger people that may advance the ability for critical reflection. Therefore, it may still be justified to assume that, in general, adult students are more capable of critical reflection than are traditional undergraduate students. Further, adult students may be more likely to engage in critical reflection and thus transformative learning for still another reason: Transformative learning is more likely in times of life transitions (Mezirow, 1981), and negotiating life transitions was found to be an important reason for adult students to come back to school (Charland, 1980; Wilbert, 1980; Greenberg, 1980; Cross, 1981; Steltenpohl & Shipton, 1986; Seger, 1989).

The personal growth or transformative learning that adult students may experience is connected closely to the life transitions they are trying to negotiate. Typically, transitions are evoked by an external event such as a divorce, death of spouse, or change of jobs (Mezirow et al., 1990). The transitions in the life of females are closely tied to human relationships. Women's sense of self has been organized around being able to develop and maintain relationships. Most women define their identities not through their own activities and achievements but through those of their significant others, their fathers, then their husbands, and later their children or even their bosses (Miller, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Belenky et al.,

1986; Josselson, 1987). Because of their great emotional involvement in the lives of those around them, coming to terms with transitions like breaking away from home, especially from their mother, divorce, separation, death of a loved one, or children leaving home, is crucial for the personal growth and development of women (Schlossberg, 1976; Miller, 1986; Kessler & McLeod, 1984; Rossi, 1985; Carter & McGoldrick, 1989; Mercer et al., 1989). In order to function effectively in the new situation brought about by the external event, a person has to undergo an internal change or, expressed in other words, a perspective transformation. Thus negotiating life transitions means to become aware of currently held perspectives, to examine critically the validity of the taken-for-granted perspectives in the light of the new situation brought about by the external event, to explore alternative perspectives, to restructure currently held perspectives in a way that the new situation can be dealt with, and to act based on the new perspectives. Consequently, facilitating growth and development of adult students means helping them to move through life transitions. This translates into providing adult students with opportunities to examine and restructure meaning perspectives necessary to adapt to the new situation brought about by the external event.

Influence of Higher Education on Student Development

The influence of higher education on student development has received much attention. Chickering (1969), Perry (1970), and Kohlberg (1969) introduced student development theories. Studies have been done on the cognitive, affective, social, and moral development of students as they pass through college. These studies indicate that students experience significant growth in a variety of areas during their college years (Chickering, 1980; Terenzini et al., 1984). Seniors were found to be more rational, open-minded, tolerant, autonomous, self-confident, self-aware, altruistic, and critical than freshmen (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Astin, 1977; Bowen, 1977; Strange & King, 1981; Leonetti, 1990).

Widick et al. (1978) assert that the biggest changes occur during the first half of the freshman year. The remaining years of college are used to adjust to that initial change (Heath, 1968; Widick et al., 1978). Hood (1986), on the other hand, found that the biggest change in identity development takes place during the sophomore through senior years.

Feldman and Newcomb (1969) specify what leads to personal growth. They affirm that personal growth of college students when it occurs results from a combination of peer influence and living situations. Classroom and curricular experience do not significantly promote personal growth of the students. The learners seem to experience difficulties relating their course work to the search for meaning in their lives. This less optimistic view of the growth-promoting effect of classroom experiences on student development is shared by Becker (1968), who studied the totality of students' social and academic life using mainly participant observation. His principal finding was that students' academic life was dominated by assessment demands. Students' activities prevailing are targeted at achieving the grades needed to make progress through the university system. The assessment pressures make students follow instrumental ways of studying. Students who expect higher education to be stimulating and liberating, but find in contrast restricting syllabuses and assessment procedures, expressed a strong resentment towards the university.

The findings reported above are based on studies which focused exclusively on traditional-age students or did not differentiate between male and female adult students. Similarly, many of the major student development theories (e.g., Chickering, 1969; Perry, 1970; Kohlberg, 1969) were derived from in-depth interviews and observations of 18- to 24- year-old middle class white male students. Not much research has been done investigating specifically the educational experiences of female adult students in higher education. A study that examined women's experiences and problems as learners in general and their academic experiences in particular is the research conducted by Belenky et al. (1986). Their principal findings are that for growth to occur women need to know that they are capable of intellectual thought, they need to be confirmed in this knowledge, they need to feel accepted as a person, and they need to experience a sense of community. The women preferred experiential learning to learning from abstract reasoning. They rejected a system in which knowledge flowed in only one direction, from teacher to student. The kind of teacher they praised was the one who respected the voice of the students and the student's own rhythm of learning, who helped the students to articulate and expand their latent knowledge, who encouraged the students to use their knowledge rather than impersonal standards. Public dialogue, that is, group discussions in which members nurture each other's

thinking, and conversation in which teacher and students collaborate in constructing a new interpretation were cherished by many women. Some studies used adult development theories as a theoretical framework. For example, Weathersby (1980) analyzed in-depth interviews with four female adult students, using Loevinger's stages of ego development as the theoretical basis. Weathersby (1980) concluded that the engagement with individual transformation in an academic setting involves "an interaction between personal concerns, which have immediacy in students' life experience, and a disciplined thought process, which allows individuals to step outside of their experience and rename it" (p. 21).

College experiences help women especially to gain a stronger self-confidence (Hooper, 1979; Lutter, 1982; Smith & Regan, 1983; Meyer, 1986). Women were found to use the college experience to rework identity issues, that is, to find answers to questions like: Who am I? What do I do with my life? (Letchworth, 1970; Brandenburg, 1974; Badenhop & Johansen, 1980; Hetherington & Hudson, 1981; Meyer, 1986).

Many researchers conclude that returning to school represents a transition in itself and can initiate transitions in other life activities (Brandenburg, 1974; Knox, 1977; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Hetherington & Hudson, 1981; Steltenpohl & Shipton, 1986; Usher, 1986). The result of education can be an inner transformation of values and assumptions (Tarule & Weathersby, 1979).

Some educational institutions developed special programs to help adult students negotiate transitions. Smith and Regan (1983) report a life reassessment course which gives individuals the opportunity to explore their interests and abilities, to reevaluate their past education and experience, and to identify college and career alternatives. The life reassessment course deals with issues on personal growth and self-development, life goal clarification, and career planning. Participants reported that the course helped them to clarify their goals and that the mapping of alternatives in the life reassessment course initiated changes in their lives.

Steltenpohl and Shipton (1986) describe a program designed to facilitate the transition to college for adult learners. The course included a study of the life course, its crises, transitions, and dynamics of change. What it means to be an adult learner was explored, and in this way, the program helped the adults with the transition of viewing themselves as learners. In addition, the course aimed at

assessing academic skills and becoming an educated person. The course offered the participants the opportunity to get to know themselves as persons and learners and to examine the meaning of higher education.

Grennberg (1980) describes the University Without Walls program at Loretto Heights College. In this program every student can individualize his B.A. degree program. The students can choose the classes within certain limits. Independent study allows students to explore particular interests. In this way, the varied experiences, competencies, backgrounds, and goals of the adult students are respected. If students want to receive credit for noncollege learning, they have to review and reflect on the learning experience and write a report on it elaborating the relationship between the experience and what they have learned. Seminars are offered to provide opportunities for discussion and exchange of ideas with others. Greenberg (1980) reports that three types of graduates can be distinguished: Some of them speak in an intense and emotional way of their experience in the program. For them the program has facilitated a developmental transition. A second group does not show excitement, but pride and relief. The program served a specific purpose for them but did not foster their personal development. A third group, finally, completed the requirements but seemed to be intellectually as well as personally unchanged. Members of this group may have enrolled in the program not for their reasons but for the reasons of somebody else - their employer, their mother, or their wife.

Another nontraditional program at Loretto Heights College is the program "Project Transition." This program was developed to help students explore career alternatives while at the same time to broaden and deepen their awareness of themselves and their society. Small groups of ten to fifteen students meet both on the college campus and in locations within the community. The program consists of four seminars each lasting one month. The seminars are devoted to the following topics: psychology of adulthood, values in adult experience, perspectives of the future, and learning as adults. Practica in career development, a series of life/career planning and counseling activities, supplement the seminars. After having completed the program, participants of Project Transition indicate that they feel more self-confident and are more ready to move on (Greenberg & Charland, 1980).

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review shows that the mission of higher education is to promote personal growth and development of the learners. Mezirow (1991) defines development as a person's progressively increased capacity for critical reflection and thus transformative learning. Transformative learning represents significant learning in adulthood and is considered to be possible only in the adult years.

Adult students come back to school to deal with life transitions. Negotiating life transitions requires the student to reflect critically on taken-for-granted perspectives and to restructure them in a way necessary to deal with new life situations. Thus, promoting personal growth of adult students means to help adult students moving through life transitions, which, in turn, means to facilitate transformative learning. Higher education must provide adult students with an environment that allows them to critically reflect on taken-for-granted perspectives, to explore alternative perspectives, and to act on insights gained from the critical reflection process.

Studies have shown that traditional college students experience significant growth in their cognitive, affective, social, and moral development during their college years. However, not much research has been done on the influence of the college experience on the personal growth of female adult students; that is, not much is known about the transformative potential of educational experiences for adult students. Further, knowledge is lacking regarding the kinds of educational activities that are helpful in stimulating transformative learning.

CHAPTER III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative case study design was used for this research. Oral history interviews were carried out with female adult students. The interviews were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) method of grounded theory. In the following the research design will be described and a rationale for using this design will be given.

Rationale for Using a Qualitative Case Study Design

Patton (1990) states that the purpose of a study is the controlling force in research: it determines the data collection, data analysis, and reporting of the findings. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the educational experiences of female adult students are transformative experiences and thus are contributing to the growth and development of the learners. Further, the goal of the study was to identify the kinds of educational activities that stimulate transformative learning. A way to find out whether the educational experiences of a student have been transformative is to examine how the experiences affected the student's awareness of his/her perspectives and the student's readiness and capability for critical reflection. This transformative effect of educational experiences can be assessed by asking the student about the meanings he/she attributes to these experiences.

Understanding the meaning of an experience is the paramount objective of qualitative research (Mocker, 1986; Merriam, 1988). Patton (1990, p. 108) states that to "find out what it means to a student to have read a certain number of books . . ." and "how those books affected the student personally and intellectually is a question of quality." Qualitative methods enable the researcher to get to know the participants' perspectives (Mocker, 1986; Jacob, 1988), to elucidate the meaning of experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), and to gain a holistic rather than a reductionistic understanding (Mocker, 1986; Patton, 1990). Qualitative methods permit the researcher to study the meaning of experiences for students in depth, using the students' own terms (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1990).

For this research project a qualitative case study was used. A qualitative case study represents "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single

entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). A case study design is useful for investigating "problematic moments in the lives of individuals" (Patton, 1990, p. 384). Perspective transformation represents a time when deeply held perspectives are questioned and critically reflected upon. Thus times of transformation qualify as problematic moments in the lives of individuals.

Merriam (1988) recommends the use of case study designs when it is important to identify the patterns of interpretation given by subjects. This study focused on the patterns of interpretation adult students develop with regard to their educational experiences.

Case studies can provide a valuable basis for formulating hypotheses about processes and for operationalizing concepts for further verification (Becker, 1968; Merriam, 1988). Yin (1989) suggests using case studies when "how" or "why" questions are examined, when the researcher has little control over events, and when the study focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life event. Further, case studies make it possible to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of a real-life event when conducting research (Yin, 1989). Merriam (1988) indicates that "a qualitative case study is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (p. 2). Thus a qualitative case study seems to be appropriate for investigating the meaning of educational experiences for adult students.

The major way in which qualitative researchers seek to understand the meanings of people's experiences is through interviewing (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1990). For this study interviews were carried out following an oral history approach. An oral history is a conversational narrative; it is a conversation and a commentary upon the past. The goal of oral history is to encourage people to talk about experiences and events in the past and to find out what these experiences and events mean to the people who recall them (Grele, 1985). For this study, senior adult students were asked to recall educational experiences at Iowa State University and the meanings and feelings connected with these experiences.

Respondents who participate in an oral history interview are asked to examine and to give meaning to their pasts. The respondents are asked "to step outside themselves, to distance themselves from their experiences and to become (...) both insider and outsider" (Grele, 1985, p. 252). Asking respondents about

past experiences may help the respondents to become aware of areas in their lives which they may never have thought about until the interview.

Most adult students may not be aware that they are in the process of moving through a transition. The adult students may not be aware of the extent their educational experiences support or obstruct this transformative process. They may have never thought about how their educational experiences in college influence their personal lives. However, if somebody asks them what these experiences mean, the adult students may become aware that they are undergoing a transition. They may become aware of what triggered the transition and what kinds of educational experiences helped them to engage in transformative learning. Since oral history interviews may stimulate the interviewees to think about their educational experiences it seemed to be an appropriate method for this research project. The purpose of the interviews was to have students reflect on their educational experiences. Special emphasis was put on the students' accounts of significant educational events, together with their responses and their interpretations of those events.

Interviews can be interventions. An interview can make the interviewee reflect on thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and experiences, and thus lead the interviewee to find out things about him/herself that the interviewee hadn't been aware of before. In certain cases an interview can induce life changes in the interviewee. The role of the interviewer, however, is to gather data and not to change people. Thus the interviewer has to guard against overstepping his/her territory and assuming the role of a therapist (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990).

The fact that oral history interviews can encourage transformative learning represented a potential problem for this study. The purpose of this study was to examine whether educational experiences of adult students are transformative experiences. Since oral history interviews can foster transformative learning, evidence of transformative learning implied in the interviews may be due to the interviewing process and not to the educational experiences. Transformative learning may not have taken place if it would not have been triggered through the questions of the interviewer. To deal with this problem, the adult students were asked at the end of the interview process what it was like for them to serve as an interviewee for this study. The answers to this

question were expected to illuminate whether transformative learning was triggered by the educational activities, the questions of the interviewer, or both.

A further problem of the oral history interview is that present concerns can become infused with past experiences. When reconstructing the past people may choose to remember or forget aspects of that past. Painful experiences may be repressed. Events which were difficult to deal with at the time they occurred may be reinterpreted as minor disturbances when the respondent reflects on them in the present (Grele, 1985).

Forgetting past experiences may be perceived as another problem of the oral history interview. However, Grele (1985) asserts that "oral history does not have the problem of forgetfulness but rather the problem of being overwhelmed with reminiscences and memories flowing in uninterrupted and seemingly unrelated fashion" (p. 143). To facilitate a more systematic recall of past experiences and the meaning connected with them, the researcher has to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly the meanings they attribute to certain experiences and to record their responses authentically (Patton, 1990). The recommendations given by Merton et al. (1990) for carrying out focused interviews can be helpful for developing such a framework. For this study an interview guideline of open-ended questions (Appendix A) was used to help each interviewee recall her experiences from the time when she started thinking about enrolling in college up to the present.

A researcher using a qualitative case study design has to be aware of the limitations of this approach. Information obtained by qualitative case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation. Since the interviewer is the main research instrument his/her sensitivity and integrity significantly influence the results of the study (Merriam, 1988). According to Merriam (1988), the ideal case study researcher has the following characteristics: tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity, and good communication skills. A qualitative researcher needs a high tolerance for ambiguity since case study data do not allow straightforward interpretation. A qualitative researcher has to be sensitive to the context, the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the respondent, and the flow of the interview. A qualitative researcher has to be able to establish rapport with the individuals, listen intensively, and ask the right question at the right time. Further, a qualitative researcher must have

good analytical skills. The researcher fully and truthfully has to monitor and report the analytical procedures and processes used. The researcher has to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Patton, 1990). Subjectivity is inevitable. The point is to be aware of how one's perspective affects fieldwork, to carefully document all procedures so that others can review the methods employed for possible bias, and to be open in describing the limitations of the perspective presented (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Peshkin, 1988; Patton, 1990).

Issues of Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability address the question of the extent to which the researcher can trust the findings of the study (Merriam, 1988). Validity can be subdivided into construct validity, internal validity, and external validity. Construct validity deals with choosing appropriate operational measures; internal validity is concerned with how well one's findings match reality; and external validity addresses the question of how generalizable the results of the study are. Reliability refers to the extent that findings of the study will be replicated when using the same research design that was used in the study (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989). Merriam (1988) and Yin (1989) suggest different strategies for improving the validity and reliability of a case study. In this study validity and reliability issues were dealt with by using the following strategies: creation of a case study data base, chain of evidence, replication logic, case study protocol (Yin, 1989) or audit trail (Merriam, 1988), member validation, clarifying researcher bias, providing "thick" description, and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1988).

The main goals of this study were to examine the transformative nature of the educational experiences of adult students. A generalization of the results is not intended and not possible given the chosen research design. Conclusions from the findings can be drawn only for those situations, time periods, persons, contexts, and purposes for which the data are applicable (Patton, 1990).

Procedures of the Study

In the following the population, the sample size, and the interview process that was used for the study will be discussed. Further, a pilot study designed to improve the research instrument will be described. The research proposal was

reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee of Iowa State University.

Population of the study

Students differ in their readiness for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). For this study it was decided to use a population of students that is more likely than other students to have experienced transformative learning. Such a group of students was assumed to have the following characteristics: adult student, senior, female, married or formerly married, with children, and working on the first undergraduate degree.

As indicated in the literature review, adult students may be more likely to experience transformative learning for two reasons: First, they may be more capable of engaging in critical reflection because they are older and thus have more experiences that may advance their ability for critical reflection. Secondly, transformative learning is more likely in times of life transitions (Mezirow, 1981) and negotiating life transitions was found to be an important reason for adult students to come back to school (Charland, 1980; Wilbert, 1980; Greenberg, 1980; Cross, 1981; Steltenpohl & Shipton, 1986; Seger, 1989).

Seniors have spent more time in the educational setting than have other undergraduate students. For this reason seniors are likely to have had more educational experiences that could have stimulated transformative learning than other undergraduate students.

Since females are more involved in the lives of significant others, females experience higher rates of change and instability in their lives than males (Gove, 1972; Dohrenwend, 1973). This is especially true for females who are currently married or who have been married and who have children. Hence, females, and particularly married or formerly married females with children, undergo more life transitions than males or females who are single (Mercer et al., 1989). Since transformative learning is more likely in times of life transitions, married or formerly married females with children are more likely to experience transformative learning than males or females who are single. Further, females have been chosen as subjects for this study for two other reasons: First it is expected that establishing rapport may be easier with adult students of the same gender as the researcher. Thus, since the researcher is female, female adult

students were asked to serve as interviewees. Secondly, Mezirow (1975) developed his theory of perspective transformation based on information gained by conducting in-depth interviews with women participating in college re-entry programs. It has not been investigated whether the process of perspective transformation is the same for men. Since the purpose of this study was to examine whether the educational experiences of female adult students are transformative experiences in the sense as Mezirow (1991) defines transformation, staying with the same gender may help to exclude the possibility that differences in the findings may be due to differences in the gender of the subjects.

In addition to the criteria discussed above, the subjects of the study should have been born and raised in the United States. Educational experiences during the years in college may differ for students who have been raised in the United States and students who have been raised in other cultures. Thus the criteria of "being raised in the United States" was used to make sure that interviewees did not have to move to another country and undergo all the emotional and physical tension connected with this transition.

The interviewees had to be adult students, that is, 25 years of age or older. No upper age limit was set, since the ability to engage in transformative learning was assumed to exist throughout adult life.

Two types of adult students can be distinguished: adult students may be in college for the first time, or they may have dropped out of college some time ago and now have reentered college. Even though the two types of adult students have a different educational history, the likelihood for engaging in transformative learning was assumed to be the same for both the adult student who is in college for the first time and the adult student who returns to college after having dropped out of college previously. Thus the educational history of the adult student was not used as a selection criterion.

To conclude, the population for this study consisted of female adult students in their senior year who were born and raised in the United States, who were married or had been married, who have children, and who were working at their first undergraduate degree at the time of the interview.

Sample size

The validity, meaningfulness, and insights obtained by qualitative research depend more on the information-richness of the cases selected and on the observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher than on the sample size. If the goal is to maximize information, sampling should be terminated when the investigation of new sample units does not provide new information; thus lack of redundancy is the primary criterion (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Patton, 1990).

The sample size is further influenced by the resources available for the study. The researcher was the only interviewer in this study. Each subject was interviewed twice. Thus the sample size had to be limited to a manageable size.

Further, the sample size is influenced by the number of subjects in the population and the willingness of the subjects to participate in the study. Taking all these aspects together, a sample size of twenty participants was considered appropriate for this study. The subjects were selected using random sampling.

Interview process

At an initial telephone contact the researcher introduced herself and briefly explained the purpose of the study. The potential interviewee was informed that participation in the study is voluntary and that the information would be treated confidentially. In addition the interview schedule was explained. The interviewee determined the time and place of the interview. However, the interviewee was asked to schedule at least two hours for the interview and to select a quiet place. All interviews were taped and later transcribed. As soon as the transcription of the tapes was completed, the tapes were destroyed.

Every participant was interviewed twice. At the beginning of the first interview the researcher explained again the purpose of the interview, assured the interviewee that the data would be treated confidentially, and asked the interviewee to sign the consent form (Appendix B). Following an interview guideline of open-ended questions (Appendix A) the first interview was used to encourage the participant to talk about her educational experiences at Iowa State University and to comment on the meaning these experiences had for her. The interviewer deviated from the interview guideline and omitted questions or asked additional questions, depending on the flow of the conversation. The second interview was used to clarify and elaborate themes which were presented during

the first interview and to verify the findings of the first interview session. Further, the interviewees were asked what it was like for them to be involved in this interview process.

Pilot study

In spring of 1992 a pilot study was carried out. The goal of the pilot study was to find out whether the questions included in the interview guideline are clear and whether they are appropriate for examining the intended issue. Further, the pilot study was expected to help the researcher improve her interviewing skills. Three interviews were carried out. One interview was conducted with a male adult student and two with female adult students. No follow-up interviews were conducted.

The pilot study showed that the first few questions of the interview guideline were helpful in getting the interview started. After the first few questions were asked, the flow of the conversation determined the kinds of issues explored in the rest of the interview. The interviewees were open in sharing educational experiences and in commenting on the meaning of the experiences for their personal lives.

Data Analysis

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) method of grounded theory was used for the data analysis. In the following a short description of the grounded theory method will be given, and then it will be explained why the grounded theory approach was chosen for analyzing the data of this study.

Description of grounded theory method

Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to grounded theory as the discovery of theory from data obtained systematically from social research. Elements of grounded theory are conceptual categories, properties, and hypotheses. A category stands by itself as a conceptual element of the theory. A property, in turn, is a conceptual element of a category. Properties may be causes, conditions, consequences, dimensions, types, processes, etc. Both categories and properties are concepts indicated by the data, but are not the data themselves. Hypotheses are generalized relations among the categories and their properties. Categories,

together with their properties and hypotheses, are generated from the data by the constant comparative method.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe the constant comparative method as follows. First, each incident in the data is coded into as many categories of analysis as possible. Coding can be done by noting categories on the margins of paper on which the responses are recorded, but can also be carried out more elaborately (e.g., on cards). When coding an incident for a category, it is compared with other incidents that were coded into the same category. By this constant comparison of the incidents theoretical properties of the category are generated, such as the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, its relation to other categories, and its other properties.

There are two kinds of categories: those that the researcher has generated himself/herself, and those that have been derived from the language of the research situation. The concepts derived from the research situation are likely to be labels that are currently in use for the actual processes and behaviors that are to be explained, while the concepts generated by the researcher are more likely to constitute the explanations. The emerging concepts should be analytic and sensitizing. "Analytic" means that the concept should be generalized sufficiently to designate characteristics of concrete entities, not the entities themselves. "Sensitizing" means that the concept should provide a meaningful picture, giving illustrations that allow one to grasp the reference in terms of one's own experience. Making concepts both analytic and sensitizing helps the reader to see and hear vividly the people in the area under study.

Further along in the coding process the researcher no longer compares one incident with another, but with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents. The constant comparative method generates not only categories but also hypotheses. At first, the hypotheses seem unrelated, but as categories and properties gain in abstraction the hypotheses start to form an integrated theoretical framework - the core of the emerging theory. The grounded theory method requires that collection, coding, and analysis of data be done together. The researcher continually reexamines and modifies the first only vaguely formulated theory as new data are collected and analyzed.

As the research progresses, the theory becomes increasingly focused and delimited. Delimiting the theory can be done at two levels: the theory and the categories. First, the theory solidifies, in the sense that major modifications become fewer and fewer as the coding continues. Later modifications result mainly in clarifying the logic, eliminating non-relevant properties, integrating details of properties into the major outline of interrelated categories, and, most important, reduction. Reduction may occur if underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties are discovered and, based on this knowledge, a theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts is formulated. Reduction of terminology and consequent generalizing serves to fulfill two major requirements of theory: parsimony of the theory, and applicability of the theory to a wide range of situations while keeping a close correspondence of theory and data.

The second level for delimiting the theory consists in reducing the original list of categories for coding. As the theory grows, becomes reduced, and increasingly works better for ordering a mass of qualitative data, the original list of categories for collecting and coding data can be cut down. Coding and analyzing incidents can then become more select and focused. Another factor which also contributes to delimiting the list of categories is that the categories become theoretically saturated, that is, additional data no longer provide new insights regarding the properties of the category. Saturation of categories indicates that sampling can stop.

Coded data and the emerging theory are the results of the grounded theory method. The content behind the conceptual categories of the theory can be discussed in the form of memos which, in turn, become the major themes of the theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend that the literature of the area under study should be ignored when beginning to generate the theory, so that the researcher will not be tempted to copy conceptual categories which have been developed and thus are more suitable for other purposes. Similarities and convergences within the literature can be elaborated after the analytic core of categories has been established.

Reasons for using the grounded theory method in this study

Typically, the method of grounded theory is used for the discovery of theory from data. The purpose of this study is not to discover a new theory, but to examine whether the educational experiences of adult students in higher education are transformative experiences and to identify what kinds of educational activities can stimulate transformative learning in adult students. Nevertheless, using the grounded theory approach for data analysis in this study seems to be beneficial for the following reason. The grounded theory method can help to prevent the opportunistic use of Mezirow's theory to explain what is found; that is, the method helps to prevent imposing Mezirow's theory on the data. Generating categories and hypotheses based on the data is expected to forestall forcing a connection between Mezirow's transformative theory and the data.

Furthermore, although the main purpose of the study is not the discovery of a new theory, the study may help to refine Mezirow's theory and/or discover new aspects of transformative learning.

CHAPTER IV. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the educational experiences of female adult students are of transformative nature, and thus can stimulate the critical reflection process. Twenty randomly selected female adult students were interviewed. The focus of the interviews was on the time before returning to college and on their experiences at college. The oral history method was applied to conduct the interviews. The grounded theory method by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used to analyze the data establishing themes and categories.

In this chapter, general observations regarding the interview process are described. Then, the information obtained during the interviews is presented and clarified. The presentation is organized around themes and categories that evolved out of the information base.

Interview Process

The first contact with the female adult students interviewed for this study was a telephone conversation. Only two out of the 22 female adult students that were contacted declined to participate in the study. The interviewees were very cooperative. They appeared at the time scheduled for the interviews. They were very willing to participate in a follow-up interview. They informed the interviewer in case they had to postpone the interview. In fact, interviews had to be postponed quite frequently since family emergencies interfered with the time set aside for the interview. Most of the interviews were conducted on campus, but some interviews were carried out in the home of the interviewees, and some interviews in other off-campus locations. The first interview took about one and a half hour. The follow-up interview was completed within 45 minutes in most cases. Most of the participants of the study seemed to enjoy the interview process. Many indicated that the interview gave them a chance to reflect on their experiences in college and to express their frustrations and concerns with college. The interviewees answered most of the questions even though some questions reminded them and made them think about stressful times in their lives. Some had a hard time talking about painful experiences in

their earlier life and felt sad after the interview. A few participants mentioned that they were exhausted after the interview since it was "hard mental work."

Information Obtained from the Interviewees

To identify whether the educational experiences of the female adult students were transformative experiences, the interviewees were asked about their lives prior to enrolling in college, their reasons for enrolling in college, their reasons for enrolling in college at this point in time, their experiences in college, and their plans after graduation. Questions about their life prior to enrolling in college were asked to see if their life experiences prior to enrolling in college may have influenced their decisions of enrolling in college and the meanings they attribute to college. Questions about their plans after graduation were asked to see if their college experience may have affected their goals in life and the underlying meaning perspectives about themselves. In addition, the interviewees volunteered information that was not specifically asked for in the interviews. The information that was obtained from the interviewees is presented in this chapter in the form of themes and categories. The themes subdivide the chapter in different sections and are stated in the form of questions. The information provided in the categories build the answers to the questions.

What was going on in the life of the interviewees prior to enrolling in college?

The theme "life experiences prior to enrolling in college" can be subdivided into three categories: childhood experiences, college experience right after high-school, and life experiences immediately prior to enrolling in college.

Childhood experiences Nearly all of the subjects talked about their childhood at some point in the interview. Their childhood memories may have influenced their outlook on life and in turn, their decisions to enroll in college. The reader may keep these stories in mind when learning about the reasons for enrolling in college and the meanings that the interviewees attribute to college in the later sections of this chapter.

Sally: I had a lot of problems in grade school. . . . We had that preached into us, a lot of fear about religion. . . . We had a big thing about being perfect. We talked about the Pope and he is so perfect. It gives you a feeling of being bad. . . . As a child I had a very violent family. Neglect on my mother's side and physical abuse on my father's side. My mother was pretty helpless herself like women.

Deb: The relationship my father and I had for years. It was stormy. I used to wish he would die. I couldn't listen any more to all that criticism and yelling. . . . I spent a lot of years in Catholic schools. . . . There was always talk about hell-fire and damnation.

Frances: My family was very dysfunctional when I was growing up. It was a hard time. It was all I could do, get out of the house. . . . And some of the things were coming up when I was a child and I did not want this to happen to my daughter too. My father was an alcoholic too.

Iris: My mother was a widow and had to provide for six kids, and she had no job skills, she had no driver's license, she didn't have a social security number, she never wrote a check. . . . My Mom was totally oppressed. And if there would not have been social security we would have starved.

Ginny: I grew up in a city where there is a lot of welfare mothers, no fathers, and these women I grew up with, they had curlers in their hair and housecoats on. . . . School didn't count. When you were 16, you got a job. . . . It was very acceptable at the place where I was. . . . And all I knew were these women with curlers and house dresses.

Nina: I think I have had a low self-esteem a lot in my life. And that goes back probably to my childhood. . . . I lived kind of under the idea when I was growing up that when you did something for yourself that that was being selfish.

Lori: Some really bad things occurred to me personally when I was a real young child. I felt powerless. . . . I kind of felt that I was strange, as if there was something wrong with me. And people would hold me up as an example: She reads all the time, isn't that different? She plays quietly in her room, isn't that different? . . . And they would go so far as to say: You shouldn't be that way. You shouldn't act that way. . . . The rewards I got were for washing dishes very well, not for getting a good grade, and the punishments were things like: "You can't take the car to go to college today because I have to get my hair fixed." . . . My family

has always taught me that doctors and anybody that makes x amount of dollars is above us, and we can't deal with them because they own us and they are more powerful than we are.

Kathy: When I look back on my childhood, teen years, every step I tried to take forward my mother would not approve. I couldn't go to college. I wanted to come to Iowa State after graduation from high school and she said: No, that I would never make it. What I should do is to go into the navy instead. I didn't want to do that.

Jackie: When I was a little kid I remember my Dad and my uncle discussing Franklin Roosevelt and the progressive party. Oh, that was great. Sitting and listening to them, it was fascinating. I have always been interested (in politics) but I have never done anything with my interest.

Ginny: In one of my classes I learned about Marie Curie and her daughter and I was fascinated because a woman did this . . . and Emilia Erhardt . . . she was a woman pilot . . . and I had a female doctor from India. . . . There is something so fascinating to me that these women had done this. And I can never let go of these three women. . . . And it was different from the women I grew up seeing. So I put these women on a pedestal. But I never did anything with it, never thought anything about it. But they are still my heroes through all these years, they are mountain-movers to me. I think a Ph.D. has something to do with these three women.

College experience right after high-school Out of the twenty interviewees 17 had been in college before. Seven of them - Deb, Ellen, Frances, Mona, Nina, Pam, Sally - mentioned that they went to college right after high-school because their parents or their high-school teachers expected them to go. As mentioned in the section on "Childhood experiences" Lori and Kathy had opposite experiences. Their parents did not want them to go to college.

Upon arriving at college it is interesting to see what made them pick their major. Some interviewees mentioned that gender stereotypes restricted their choice of major.

Lori: And in high-school it was you shouldn't take science, you shouldn't take math. You probably should type and go and be a secretary. And that frustrates me now.

Deb : My father was saying that women should become lawyers, teachers or nurses, and I did not like that, and so I dropped out of college.

Nina: When I was younger there were just two careers for a woman (nurse, teacher) and that was the way I was brought up.

Helen: It has been nursing or education. And you know at that time there weren't as many female jobs available or role models.

Iris and Nicole left college after they had obtained a two-year degree. The other 15 interviewees who had been in college before dropped out of college without a degree. The interviewees indicated the following reasons for dropping out: Seven - Helen, Jackie, Kirsten, Mona, Lisa, Rose, Lori - dropped out of college to get married. Three of these seven - Lisa, Rose, Kirsten - indicated that they dropped out of college to work to help put their husband through college. Seven - Nina, Rose, Kirsten, Pat, Lisa, Lori, Pam - indicated financial problems as reasons for dropping out of college. Amy, Frances, and Ellen had academic problems. Besides academic problems Ellen mentioned two other reasons for dropping out of college: the program she wanted to go into was not offered, and she had a well paying job. Deb dropped out of college since her father wanted her to become a nurse, lawyer or teacher, and she did not want to go into any of these professions. Sally dropped out of college because she was pregnant. Lori dropped out because she did not get any encouragement from home.

Life experiences immediately prior to enrolling in college as adult students Many of the interviewees had to deal with stressful events in their lives in the years prior to enrolling in college as adult students. Eight have been or still are in unhappy marriages. Four had to cope with the death of a family member. Two had to deal with illness or disability of family members. Four had a hard time as their children left home or became more independent. Many of the interviewees were more or less dissatisfied with their work situation. Three felt not appreciated being a housewife. Two feel that they don't have an identity of their own. One was dissatisfied being a mother. One experienced a severe

depression prior to enrolling in college. One had a bad experience with her roommate. One was struggling to break away from her husband. One developed an increased sense of security due to a "religious experience." One revised a childhood view. And one identified commonalties among people of different cultures due to a stay in Mexico. In the following these experiences of the interviewees are discussed in more detail.

Marriage Frances, Ginny, Deb, Michelle, and Nicole mentioned that their husband was trying to control their lives. Deb, Michelle, and Nicole got divorced. Frances and Ginny were separated from their husband for some time. The following quotes may illustrate how the interviewees perceived their relationships with their husbands.

Frances: It was an alcoholic relationship. . . . He was telling me about all these things that he felt I should be doing. . . . I wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Ginny: There has been a couple of times I have mentioned doing certain things and he said he wouldn't think I would be good at that, and I would just drop it. . . . If he said: Jump. I said: How high? . . . He just wanted me home. . . . My biggest struggle was breaking that original bond of being where he wanted me to be . . . and if it meant forfeiting the marriage I would.

Deb: And he was still trying to keep me in . . . and to protect me and I did not want to be protected. And I did not have a chance to have a life.

Michelle: I still resent having people putting words in my mouth, and he did a lot of that: Oh, you don't want to do this. You want to do that instead. . . . Nobody was paying any attention to me.

Nicole: He wanted to stay in that area because his parents lived there but I wanted to leave. I thought I had convinced him to look at other options, and he came one day and he had rented a little farm. And I told him that this is fine if this is what you want but I'm not gonna be there any more.

Kathy's husband was physically and verbally abusive. Ellen's husband and Lori's husband spent a great deal of time away from the family drinking with their friends. All three interviewees got divorced from their husbands.

Kathy: I have been told from the man I was married to before that I was dumb, I was stupid, and I grew up believing that. . . . And I was a battered wife too when I was married.

Ellen: It wasn't like a family, he was gone all the time. . . . Ninety-nine percent or I should say maybe ninety percent of the time I knew where I could find him - he was in the bar. And going out, drinking with his friends was more important to him than his family.

Lori: He said because of his job he had to go out and do these things but he got extremely drunk all the time.

Death of family members Helen and Iris had to overcome the death of their husband. Both experienced a feeling of emptiness after the death of their husband and were looking for a new focus in their life.

Helen: You know, a lot of my self-worth is through my marriage and through the business because that was the main point of our lives for so long. So a lot of that was gone. . . . So there is this big void that has to be filled with something.

Iris: I need something light in my life.

Michelle and Nicole had to cope with the loss of one of their parents. The death of their parents made them realize that they would not live forever and that they had to do now what they wanted to do in their lives.

Michelle: It started when my Dad passed away. . . . All the protection was gone. . . . I cannot call him up and say: Help, fix this. I had to do it myself. . . . It made me realize that life doesn't last forever.

Nicole: My mother died unexpectedly. . . . I remember thinking that I was an orphan. And I started focusing on that life is gonna end one of these days and if I didn't do what I want to do now there may be no time left.

Illness, disability Nicole's younger brother was in a car accident and is now handicapped. Iris' youngest daughter was seriously ill.

Children becoming independent Jackie, Sally, Deb, and Nina indicated that they felt unfulfilled and worthless when their children left home or did not need them as much any more.

Jackie: You feel kind of left behind. As they go on to college . . . you kind of feel like the dummy at home. . . . You feel like that you are worthless, unvalued. That's probably an overstatement but it leans toward that.

Sally: I was kind of over-protective or something but he is my only child, and I lived my whole life around him. . . . I had to do something to try to fulfill myself because he doesn't need me as much as he used to.

Deb: It is kind of like your usefulness is gone. . . . They didn't need me any more.

Nina: And then suddenly I didn't have any child home with me. And at that point I felt I was kind of rattling around the house. . . . I felt a need to be needed.

Dissatisfaction with the work situation Lori, Frances, and Deb had bad experiences at the work place. Lori was sexually harassed and was passed over by a man when it came to being promoted. A statement of her supervisor made a lasting impression on her:

Lori: You know, in this company the only way you are gonna get ahead is to grow a dick. . . . He could have slapped me in the face and I would have felt the same.

Frances indicated that her former boss took advantage of her since she was dependent on her job.

Frances: And the boss was mean to me because he knew I needed the job.

Deb felt belittled and looked down upon at work. This treatment together with the feeling of not being needed by her children any more hurt her self-esteem as the following quote shows:

Deb: They just overlook you completely. . . . They have an attitude of: This little thing behind the desk. . . . You reach a point where you start to believe it. Well, they are better than I am. . . . Well, okay, I'm a little non-entity. . . . So many years you are told you are not okay and eventually you are not. . . . And I wasn't feeling that I was the perfect mother because they didn't need me, and I wasn't the perfect employee because they were acting like little creeps. I wasn't the perfect anything. So then you start to think, well, then you are not.

Iris, Kirsten, Rose, Pam, Pat, and Amy were dissatisfied with their work situation. Iris felt that in her former job as nurse she was not appreciated. Kirsten, Rose, and Pam indicated that their former job wasn't challenging enough. Pat and Amy were dissatisfied with the money they could earn in a job that did not require a college education.

"Just a housewife" syndrome Jackie, Mona, and Lisa stayed home with their children before they enrolled in college. All of them indicated that raising children is a very important task, however, at the same time they thought that society does not value women who stay at home. This perception in turn made them feel worthless and gave them the impression that they have to get a degree and a job outside the home to be more appreciated by society. The following quotes may help to illustrate this point.

Jackie: You were just a housewife. The product that you produced in good kids was valued but you as a person were not valued because you were just a housewife. . . . And I think this is a terrible concept because if we do not properly raise our children, society will never . . . the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

Lisa: Sometimes you feel like: All I can do is cook and clean and change diapers. . . . I think people still do have the notion that if you are just a housewife, you can't possibly have any ideas about what is going on in the real world. . . . If I'm home with my kids it is not a valued thing by society. I'm just a housewife. Although it is very important to raise

children. It is a real important job. But sometimes it is difficult to viewing yourself . . . doing a really important thing.

Mona: I don't really know whether I feel guilty about it or what - just being an at-home Mom. Lots of times you feel guilty about it that you are not out there working. You see so many other Moms are out in the work force or at least at the time it seems like: Oh, you got to be a superwoman. You got to work and take care of your family, be a gracious hostess at your house and have your house all clean and all of this. I kind of felt a little guilty that I wasn't doing more but yet I knew in my heart that what I was doing was the right thing for me, to be at home. . . . I need to stay at home while my kids are little.

Jackie, Lisa, and Mona developed the perception that society does not value homemakers from their interactions with other adults. They reported that other adults in social gatherings did not engage in conversations with them since they did not have anything interesting to talk about.

Jackie: I notice now when people ask me what I'm doing and I say: I'm a student. Oh, you are a student. Isn't that interesting! If I had said: I'm just a housewife they just pass over you as if you don't amount to anything even. . . . If I were to say I'm just a housewife I would be immediately passed over because you have no value. You are uninteresting. You are unimportant. Well, we go on to somebody else who is making money because that is important.

Lisa: Sometimes I remember thinking: I got to get out of this place. All I do is talk baby talk. If I finally get a chance to talk to other adults I don't have anything else to talk about than changing diapers and the new recipes.

Mona: And at the Christmas parties the head executives would come around and visit with everybody and if they knew the wife worked, they tend to visit more with the wife. But if they knew that wife was at home there was just like, you are an appendage of this employee, you feel like you are your husband's shadow or whatever. And you are just not worth much. But, yeah, when somebody came up to you and said: You teach such and such that must be really interesting work! and then you can add to the conversation and go from there. All I had to talk about were my kids.

Lacking their own identity Mona and Michelle felt that they were defined in terms of their relationship to their husband, and they did not have an identity or life of their own.

Mona: You feel like your husband's shadow or whatever.

Michelle: All my friends they had lives outside somebody's wife. They had careers. They had things that identified them with themselves, and they weren't just somebody's wife or somebody's mother. . . . And going back to work helped it a little but being somebody else's secretary wasn't a whole lot different. You worked but I didn't feel a lot of sense of accomplishment.

Unhappy being a mother Kathy expressed strong feelings of dissatisfaction about being a mother and having to stay with her children since she could not afford a baby-sitter.

Kathy: I felt trapped. . . . Motherhood was not what I was cut out to be and I was not happy being a mother. . . . It was driving me crazy.

Depression Sally suffered from a severe depression and was hospitalized for treatment before she came back to school. She described her situation as follows:

Sally: I went through a pretty devastating depression . . . the worst experience I ever had in my life. . . . It was either trying to do something or kill myself to tell you the truth. And it was very, very hard. I went through a month just thinking suicidal thoughts and being preoccupied with death.

Being used by her roommate When Frances was separated from her husband, she lived with another woman. However, Frances disliked the woman since she felt that this woman exploited her. In addition the woman was enrolled in college but did not go to her classes, which made Frances upset since Frances herself wanted to go to school but did not have the opportunity.

Frances: She used me. . . . I was supposed to take care of her kids. . . . It just got to the point where I didn't feel safe in my own home any more. . . . It was just terrible. . . . She went to school and she never went to

class and I thought: I wanted it so badly, and I couldn't get it, and she was just screwing off.

Struggling to break away from her husband As mentioned above, Ginny felt oppressed by her husband. Prior to enrolling in college Ginny had several experiences that made her become aware of the situation that she was in and that got her started in her struggle to break away from her husband:

- Her mother-in-law gave her the book "Widow" to read that talks about a woman that realized how unprepared she was for the world as her husband died. Reading that book Ginny realized that she was dependent on her husband:

Ginny: I'm not self-sufficient any more. That was the first time that I realized that, and I was very frightened.

- A friend of Ginny recommended taking a course in transactional analysis and a course in assertiveness. The course in transactional analysis helped her understand herself a little better, and the course in assertiveness helped her to be firm in obtaining her goals.

Ginny: I could understand why I do things, where I'm coming from and I think that was the turning point. . . . Transactional analysis was letting me know that there is something inside of me.

Ginny: Assertiveness, it presented power to me. I realized that just saying a few words nicely, it gave me power. And I grew up taking care of everybody. I didn't have to do that any more. I didn't even have to explain myself. I just had to say no. And if I wanted something and somebody was disagreeable, I just had to repeat what I wanted.

- Her mother-in-law told her to learn from her husband how to complete the income tax return. This experience made her want to have a mind of her own.

Ginny: Once I started doing that, it wasn't enough any more. I wanted a mind which I didn't have any more. I had given him my mind.

- Ginny read "Reality Therapy" by Glaser. Her favorite phrase of the book became: "So what are the odds of that happening?" From then on every time she

was afraid of doing something she said: "Well, what's the odds of that happening," and she started to become a little braver.

- Barbara Walter's book "How to talk to practically anybody about practically anything" helped her to gain courage talking to people.
- Once Ginny wanted to invite a female teacher from New York from whom she took a non-credit course. Her husband did not want her to come to his house. From that incident Ginny concluded that her husband did not respect her wishes and feelings.

Ginny: That was like a turning point for me - the sense of not accepting somebody I was excited about, for no reason. . . . And I realized he doesn't want me to have anything. . . . And I got a very strong message from that and then I started to look at all the double standards in our relationship: You have to leave me a note thing. But I don't leave no notes. . . . What you want is not important. How you feel is not important. The things that are important to you aren't important.

- A friend of hers made her aware that she doesn't own her opinions.

Ginny: Do you know that whenever someone asks you about your opinion about something, you were telling what your husband would think about it. And I had never noticed that. That was scary to realize that I wasn't thinking.

- The book "Feel the fear and do it anyhow" helped her to engage in activities that she was first afraid of.
- Ginny tried to be her own therapist by reading many psychology books:

Ginny: Trying to break away from my family situation, trying to understand what was going on, who I was, why I was. . . . So I was reading all those textbooks.

Increased sense of security due to a religious experience For a long time Nina thought that God's acceptance of her depended on her actions. A book she read made her come to the conclusion that God accepts her as she is. This experience in turn helped her to feel more secure.

Nina: And at one time I became a Seventh-Day-Adventist. And it was real strict in following everything what was taught. . . . I had to do all these things or I would not be saved. God would not allow me into heaven some day if I wouldn't do all these things. . . . I struggled with that for years. Trying to be good. . . . And some day I was reading something by Morris Menden. And by accepting Jesus as my Savior I don't have to do anything. . . . And then suddenly all these things started changing around in my life . . . feeling like somebody who is special in God's eyes, and I cannot suddenly fall from his grace . . . a security that I have had ever since. . . . And that helped me with my self-esteem . . . if God loves me, what does it matter if I'm living up to anybody else's expectations? That probably helped me with my whole deal with my Dad to whether or not I could ever please him or not - that didn't matter any more. . . . I think I came back to school with a little less burden on my shoulders.

"Important" people are just people too As mentioned in the section on "Childhood experiences" Lori was taught as a child that rich people are more important and more powerful than other people. A conversation with a presumably wealthy person - the president of one of the large airlines in the United States - helped her to change her childhood perspective.

Lori: I sat on the beach once and I realized that I have a conversation with the president of one of the large airlines of the United States. And we were relating. And I was a homemaker with one semester college under her belt. And we had this conversation, and he didn't seem to be bored with it. I realized that important people are just people too.

As people we are all alike Lisa lived half a year in Mexico. By interacting with Mexicans she realized that people from different countries have many things in common.

Lisa: And I guess having lived in Mexico for six months I've really come to realize that people are just people. We really have some of the same concerns about our families. Mothers want the same thing for their children, fathers want the same things. You really feel that as people, we are all more alike than we are different.

What made the interviewees decide to enroll in college?

Many interviewees indicated several reasons for enrolling in college. Thus the categories described below are not mutually exclusive. They include: get a

better-paying job, get better job opportunities, learn more, prove oneself and gain recognition from society, make a positive change in one's life, prepare oneself to contribute to society, do something on my own, meet expectations of significant others, interact with other adults, and finish what was incomplete. In the following these categories are discussed in more detail.

Get a better-paying job Eight interviewees thought that the degree would help them to find a better paying job. For Pat, Pam, Mona, Amy, Frances, Helen, Kathy, and Ellen, being able to earn more money is important to support or help support their families. Mona, Pam, Frances, and Ellen indicated in addition that being able to make more money gives them a feeling of independence or self-sufficiency. Ginny and Nina would not have to work for their family to make ends meet. For these two women the ability to be financially independent and self-supporting if they would have to, is more important than to be able to contribute to the current family income.

Get better job opportunities - challenging jobs Seventeen interviewees indicated that they want to get a degree because they expect that the degree would provide them with better job opportunities and especially open the door to jobs that they would like to have but could not obtain without a bachelor's degree. The interviewees that did *not* indicate "better job opportunities" as a reason for coming back to school are Deb, Iris, and Jackie. These three women are financially secure and thus do not have to work if they don't want to. Out of the 17 interviewees that were interested in better job opportunities, six - Helen, Kirsten, Mona, Pam, Rose, Lori - stressed that they expect that the degree will help them to get a job with more responsibility, a job that is challenging.

Learn more Three interviewees - Mona, Frances, Jackie - indicated that their interest in learning made them decide to enroll in college.

Mona: I thought it would answer a lot of questions that I have about working with children.

Frances: I wanted to increase my knowledge of things.

Jackie: Intellectual stimulation. Make the old brain work a little bit.

Prove oneself and gain recognition from society Eight interviewees - Rose, Kirsten, Deb, Frances, Ginny, Jackie, Mona, Lori - enrolled in college to prove to others and themselves that they are able to succeed in college.

For Rose getting the college degree is a way to show her future employers that she is able to do a challenging job.

Rose: Having that piece of paper saying, yes, you are capable of this. In many jobs that is all that a college degree is. Yes, you are capable of learning the job. . . . To me coming back to school is a way of proving that you can do it.

Kirsten came back to school because she wanted to prove to herself that she can do more than her former supervisor expected her to be able to do.

Kirsten: She assumed that I could do only certain things, and probably that was the reason why I felt I need more self-esteem and self-confidence. I needed to prove myself that I could do it.

As mentioned in the section "Life in the years prior to enrolling in college as adult students" Deb felt looked down upon at work. Thus for her it was important to show her coworkers and supervisors that she is capable of more than what they thought.

Deb: I guess I wanted to show everybody that I could do it.

When she was growing up Frances' parents had instilled in her that people with degrees are "a higher class of people." How important the degree is for her shows in the following quote:

Frances: I'm not going to feel like a real person or a real adult until I have that degree.

Jackie and Mona stayed home before returning to college. As mentioned in the section on "Life in the years prior to enrolling in college as adult students" they felt that they were *just* housewives. They came back to school to receive

more recognition, to show that they are capable of being more than *just* a housewife.

Jackie: To show I could . . . letting me know that I can do these things . . . trying to get back into the world . . . knowing that you can do it, knowing that you are not just a dummy housewife.

Mona: I guess it (the college degree) would make me feel more important, more appreciated, more valuable.

Lisa was another interviewee that suffered under the "Just a Housewife Syndrome." It is likely that she, too, perceived going to school and getting a degree as a way to gain recognition from society. However, she did not make any direct statements that would provide evidence for this hypothesis.

As described in the section "Childhood experiences," Lori had some bad experiences as a child. She always felt different from the rest of her family. For example, she wanted to go to college after she had finished high school, but her parents discouraged her. And even when she went to college her parents were not supportive. Going to college is partly a means for her to break away from her family and to show her family that she is able to succeed in college.

Lori: And when I finished high-school everybody would say: You can't go to college. But I do really well. . . . And I want to go for a master's. . . . They (her parents) had much higher beliefs in my brothers than in myself. Everything that I did was a shock to my family. I think that has a little bit to do with my motivation for wanting to achieve because it shocks them and I like that. . . . To break away from my family and get myself into a lifestyle that I knew that my family didn't want to have any part of . . . and this is still going on to a degree . . . I want to show off to my family that there is a lot more that I can do. I hope I will get my master's degree before my parents die so that I can show them that I can do it, and it makes me feel good.

Make a positive change in one's life Some interviewees enrolled in college because they were looking for a positive change in their lives. They felt it was time that they did something for themselves and expected that college will help them to feel better about themselves.

Iris' and Helen's husbands had died shortly before they enrolled in college. Both interviewees expected that going to college would give them a new goal for their life.

Iris: I need something light in my life. . . . I want to do something where people are in that kind of mood, where they are enthusiastic. . . . I needed that focus in my life again because I had been in this nebulous territory for years now. . . . It gives me a lot of hope for the future. . . . I need time off, and I have decided to take it.

Helen: So much of my time and energy was devoted to the business and to the marriage. So there is this big void that has to be filled with something. I guess that's how I would explain it. . . . I had to get on with my life. You have to get out. You have to go on, not live in the past. You need a goal. New goals, things to look ahead.

Deb felt useless at home and unappreciated at work. She indicated that she enrolled in school since she wanted to make some positive changes in her life.

Deb: Making a change was going to class . . . put some quality back into my life. Put something back into my life . . . I was at the recovery path. Going to school was a recovery. It was a positive thing. It was something.

Sally experienced a deep depression before she enrolled in college and was hoping that going to college would help her to feel better about herself.

Sally: I always wanted to go to school to make me feel better, to be fulfilled, especially since my son was gone . . . just making some positive changes.

For Frances going to college was a way to get out of the house, to think about something other than the problems in her marriage, to look out for herself.

Frances: It was a way to get out of the house . . . if you sit around and think about something all the time, it grows, and it grows, and it grows. Sometimes you got to go and leave it alone and don't worry about it. . . . I think it was time for me to do it. . . . And so it came down to the point

where I had given a lot for him, and it was time for me to do what I needed to do . . . you have to look out for yourself.

Similarly, Kathy indicated that going to college was a way to get out of the house, to get a break from her children.

Kathy: I knew I had to get out of that house. I was alone with five small children - six years and down, and it was driving me crazy and my only way out was to get an education because I knew I couldn't go to work because what it would cost me for a baby-sitter, it would be stupid to get a regular job.

Mona did not express as negative feelings as Kathy as far as staying home is concerned but did express a desire to get out of the house.

Mona: Ah, it is good to get out of the house. I really appreciate it being able to be with other adults.

Jackie, Lisa, Nina, Nicole, and Michelle felt unfulfilled staying at home. They consider going to college as a challenge, as an opportunity to explore other sides of life.

Jackie: Well, I was getting bored. The kids were all gone from home. . . . Well, it is kind of lonesome by yourself. Although being by myself I have never minded that. And your husband is going out and doing work and meeting interesting people. And you aren't part of anything any more. You are just at home and that's it.

Lisa: And then I decided my kids are getting old enough, I need to do this for me. . . . There's got to be more to life than just staying up all night and taking care of sick children and changing diapers . . . see what is outside.

Nina: And then suddenly I didn't have any child home with me. And at that point I felt I was kind of rattling around the house. . . . I didn't feel like I was doing anything for myself. It wasn't much to help my self-esteem or feel good about myself.

Nicole: I'm not gonna be there any more. I will either go to school or I want to get employment somewhere. And it is a rural place and the

employment opportunities are not that good. And so the other option was going to school.

Michelle: And I was just really frustrated. I wanted to have my life too. I didn't feel any sense of fulfillment in what I was doing. I ran with a group of women. And everybody either had careers or businesses or they were going back to school and I felt like gee, I don't have anything.

Prepare oneself for being able to contribute to society One of the motivations for eight interviewees to enroll in college was to get a degree so that they would be able to better contribute to society. When asking the interviewees why it is important for them to contribute to society, some of them indicated that it makes them feel better about themselves.

The following quotes may help to illustrate this reason for enrolling in college.

Ellen: I can't reach all of my students but if I can touch the lives of some of them that will be my contribution to the world. . . . At least when it is time for me to leave this earth, I will have a good feeling that I contributed in some way to making this a better place to live in.

Helen: Feeling that I'm contributing. . . . To feel worthwhile.

Nina: I felt a need, a need to be needed. And feel like you are doing something worthwhile.

Lisa: Making a contribution to the bigger picture.

Jackie: I'd like to make a difference some place and I don't know that having that degree will do that. . . . I think it is just a feeling of self-worth, that you are contributing something, that you are important, that you are alive . . . to make a contribution of some sort to be more than just a housewife.

Sally, Lori, and Kathy want to help people who are in situations they have been in some years ago.

Sally: And my experiences in school weren't that great and I want to make education more enjoyable for children.

Lori: And having felt that powerless at one point in my life . . . and looking around I saw that there are a lot of other people that are the way I used to be, so powerless. And I felt that there is something that I can do to give them a little bit of power.

Kathy: I'm more determined than ever to get my degree and to use my personal experience (she was a battered woman) along with my education to help other people who are going through things that I have been through.

Do something on my own Jackie, Michelle, Kathy, and Helen consider college an opportunity to do something on their own.

Jackie: But now I think I want to do my own thing if I figure out what that is.

Michelle: School I'm doing for me. That's not because somebody else told me to or somebody else thought I should. This was my decision.

Kathy: I wanted to be able to do things on my own. My mother had me right under her thumb because I had no financial means.

Helen: Although I worked in every area too (talking about her husband's business) it was more his, whereas this is just something completely my own.

Meet expectations of significant others For some interviewees expectations of their parents or significant others might have influenced their decision to enroll in college. The following quotes may help to illustrate this point.

Nina: I often wondered if this is one way of fulfilling a wish, to have my Dad be proud of me.

Mona: It was very important to them that all of us at least went to college, and then it was a really big deal if any one of us graduated - it was really important to them. So I felt some pressure.

Frances: My parents pushed it into us that there were people who do have a college degree, and that they are a higher class of people, and that's what I wanted, and I wanted a job.

Deb: My father and I have been on uneasy terms. . . . And now he feels good that I'm getting a degree in. . . . So it eases that relationship.

Sally: I went to a very, very strict Catholic school. And they always placed such a high priority on education, and I think this is instilled in me. . . . So I think that was just kind of in my soul that education is a very important thing. This might be part of the reason why I had it in the back of my head. They put such a high value on education, that might have rubbed up on me. I always had a high respect for education.

Amy: I guess I had a conversation with one of my aunts that live here in Iowa. And she had said something about that she was disappointed that one of my sisters hadn't done more with what she was offered and I thought: Boy! It was just something that clicked in my mind.

Interact with other adults Lisa and Mona - both had stayed at home with their children before enrolling in college - indicated that part of the reason for enrolling in college is to meet other adults.

Finish what is incomplete Out of the seventeen interviewees who had been in college before, seven interviewees indicated that they enrolled in college to finish the degree that they had started earlier since "half a degree wasn't worth anything."

What made the interviewees decide to enroll in college at this point in time?

The interviewees were asked to indicate the reason that made them decide to enroll in college at this point in time and not earlier or later in their lives. Many of the interviewees who had been in college before - Ellen, Frances, Helen, Jackie, Pam, Rose, Sally, Nina, Michelle, Kathy, Nicole, Mona, Pat - mentioned that they had thought about returning to college for a long time. However, certain circumstances in their lives made it difficult for them to enroll in college right away. Later on in their lives these circumstances changed. In addition, other factors encouraged them to go to college. In the following the change in the

life circumstances and the factors that encouraged the female adult students to enroll in college are described. The categories are not mutually exclusive.

Change in family situation Seven interviewees - Jackie, Lisa, Mona, Nina, Rose, Sally, Kathy - indicated that they did not enroll in college earlier because they wanted to stay home with their children as long as they were small. As their children were leaving home, started school or daycare, or were taken care of by other family members, the interviewees did not have to devote as much time to their children any more and thus were able to enroll in college.

Change in marital status Deb and Ellen pointed out that their husbands did not want them to enroll in college. Later on, Ellen and Deb got divorced. Their husbands could not influence their decisions any more, and the two women followed their desire to enroll in college. Helen did not enroll in college earlier in her life since she was busy helping her husband with his business. Then Helen's husband died, and Helen sold the business. Thus lack of time was no longer a reason for not attending college.

Change in access to financial resources Seven interviewees - Frances, Nina, Lisa, Kathy, Lori, Sally, Ellen - mentioned that lack of money hindered them from enrolling in college earlier in their lives. Later on, they had some money saved up or had found out that they could get financial aid to go to college. Thus lack of financial resources was no longer a barrier for enrolling in college.

Moving to a university town Mona did not like the idea of having to commute every day to get to the university. Then, Mona and her family moved to a university town since her husband found a job there. Thus Mona no longer had to commute to attend college.

Changing perception on commuting Like Mona, Rose did not want to commute every day. In contrast to Mona, Rose did not move to a university town. However, her perception of having to commute changed. She no longer considered commuting as a problem.

Time pressure Seven interviewees - Ellen, Helen, Iris, Kirsten, Pam, Rose, Michelle - felt that time is running out and that they have to enroll in college now if they want to do it at all. Three interviewees - Helen, Michelle, Niccle - developed the notion that time is running out as a consequence of a death in their family.

Encouragement by a friend or family member Ginny, Frances, and Kirsten decided to enroll in college since a friend or family member went to college too and thus served as a role model for them. Ellen was encouraged by her brother to enroll in college.

Accompanying a friend or family member to an adult student orientation program Kirsten and Lisa accompanied a friend or family member to an adult student orientation program. This experience triggered in them the desire to enroll in college themselves.

What made the interviewees choose their current major?

The interviewees gave many different reasons that made them choose their current major. The reasons that were mentioned most often were as follows: former life experiences aroused the interest in that field, the major was considered a good preparation for being able to contribute to society after graduation, and job opportunities in the field are good. In the following the categories are discussed in more detail. The categories are not mutually exclusive.

Former life experience In many cases the major that an interviewee selected was related to a former experience she had either at work, as a volunteer or in her personal life. For example, Amy, Frances, Michelle, Nicole, Mona, and Pam chose their current major because it was connected to a job they had prior to enrolling in college. For Lisa, Helen, Nina, and Ellen, it was a former volunteer job that led them to decide on their current major. A former experience in their personal life made Ginny, Sally, Lori, Nicole, Pat, Mona, Kathy, and Jackie enroll in their current major.

Being able to contribute to society Amy, Ellen, Jackie, Kathy, Lori, Pat, and Lisa selected their current major because they thought that a degree in that major will enable them to contribute to society.

Job opportunities Job opportunities were an important factor for Amy, Ginny, Helen, Kirsten, Mona, and Pam as they decided on their major.

Other reasons Other reasons that made the interviewees choose their current major were as follows: job in that field gives me still time to take care of children (Frances), can be creative in that major (Frances), major offers a Ph.D. program (Ginny), sister has the same major (Kirsten), the major corresponds with my talents (Iris), husband influenced me (Lori), it was the only thing available (Lori).

How did family members and friends react to their decision of enrolling in college?

When asking the interviewees how their family reacted as they told them that they want to go to college, seven - Deb, Ellen, Frances, Ginny, Michelle, Nicole, Pat - mentioned that their husbands felt threatened and resented their enrollment in college. Five of them got divorced from their husbands in the meantime. The husbands of another four interviewees - Helen, Jackie, Pam, Rose - were neither discouraging nor encouraging. And the husbands of eight interviewees - Amy, Iris, Kirsten, Kathy, Lisa, Nina, Mona, Lori - supported them in their decision to go to college. Frances, Ginny, and Jackie indicated that their husbands became more supportive as time went on.

The interviewees received support or criticism regarding their going to college from other family members: Kathy's and Lori's parents discouraged them. However, when Kathy started college her mother took care of three of her children for some time. Frances' family offered to help her pay for college. Nicole's brother criticized her for going to college. Her father and her sisters, however, encouraged her. Jackie, Kirsten, Sally, and Rose received support from their children, Ellen from her brother, and Pam, Ginny, and Hellen from their sisters.

Four interviewees - Michelle, Lori, Nicole, Pat - mentioned that friends supported them in their decision to go to college. Four others - Ellen, Frances, Lisa, Mona - indicated that the adult student orientation program encouraged them to enroll in college.

What were their initial concerns and thoughts about going to college?

Ten interviewees indicated that they were scared to enroll in college. Nine - Frances, Deb, Michelle, Jackie, Kirsten, Kathy, Mona, Nina, Rose - were worried about their academic abilities. They asked themselves whether they could still study. Six interviewees - Deb, Rose, Mona, Helen, Michelle, Jackie - indicated that they were concerned that the traditional undergraduate students would not accept them. For Helen and Mona this fear was based on their memory of an adult student who was in one of their classes when they went to college after high-school and who was not well treated by the teacher or was left out by the other students. Three - Ellen, Mona, Kathy - were afraid that they would not have enough time for their studies. Mixed with the concerns of failing, of not having enough time to study, and of not being accepted by the younger students were feelings of excitement about going to college and feelings of "I'm capable of doing more than I have done before."

What are their concerns and thoughts during their time in college?

Several interviewees went first to a community college before transferring to the university. The interviewees indicated that it was helpful for them to go to a small college first since the school is smaller, people get to know each other faster, and the percentage of adult students is higher. Being with other adult students reduced the fear of not fitting in. In addition, the adult students had good experiences with traditional-age college students which further diminished their concerns that they would not be accepted by their fellow students due to their age.

By obtaining good grades on their first papers and tests, the interviewees lost their fear of failing in college. On the other hand, almost all mentioned that they lack time for studying due to family obligations. At the same time, they indicated that they feel guilty toward their family about not spending more time with it. Thus they are torn between their school responsibilities and family

responsibilities. The interviewees that do not feel under time pressure are mainly the ones whose children already left home or whose children are older and thus can help with household tasks.

What classes do they find interesting?

As mentioned in the section on "reasons for choosing current major," former life experiences influenced decisions about their current majors. Former life experiences influenced also what classes the interviewees like best. The interviewees prefer those classes and educational experiences that are related to a former experience at work, at a volunteer job, or in their personal life. Amy, Rose, and Pam mentioned that they prefer classes that are related to their major since they prepare them for their future job. Nine interviewees - Deb, Ellen, Ginny, Helen, Lisa, Mona, Pam, Kathy, Rose - expressed that they are especially interested in classes that deal with people and "real life." Kirsten and Michelle like math classes best since the problems they have to solve in these classes have cut and dried answers. For Helen, the instructor is more crucial for making a class meaningful to her than the subject itself. Classes that the interviewees dislike are classes that they perceive as difficult (Amy, Frances, Deb, Jackie) and classes that are outside their major (Amy, Rose).

How do they perform academically?

The female adult students were not asked about their grades in the interviews. Nevertheless, most of them chose to talk about their grades. Thus it seems that grades are very important for them. From the comments the interviewees made it could be concluded that they are very serious students. Almost all of those interviewed mentioned that they work very hard. Receiving good grades means a great deal for them. Good grades make them feel good about themselves. Further, good grades are considered important for getting a good job (Michelle, Rose), for getting into graduate school (Frances, Ginny, Deb), and for setting a good example for their children (Mona, Kirsten). Their hard work seems to pay off. Almost all of them do very well in college and are proud of their academic achievements.

What meanings do they attribute to their college experience?

Identifying the meanings that the interviewees attribute to their college experience was the main goal of the interviews. The meaning that a student attributes to an experience served as indicator for the transformative effect of the experience. The transformative effect of the educational experiences will be discussed in the next chapter.

The following describes the meanings the interviewees attribute to college. The categories are not mutually exclusive; that is, one interviewee can attribute several meanings to college. The following categories are distinguished: achievement of career goals, degree as source for financial security, intellectual growth, improved self-image, feeling younger, validation of my thoughts, proving myself, a new focus to leave problems behind, identity issues, examination of issues, improving my communication skills, obtaining knowledge necessary for leading "intelligent" conversations, opening up to others, other general effects, and no major effect.

Achievement of career goals Seven interviewees - Rose, Pam, Amy, Ellen, Pat, Kirsten, Helen, Mona - indicated that college for them is a means to achieve their career goals.

Degree as source for financial security Three interviewees - Nina, Michelle, Helen - mentioned that having a college degree makes them feel more financially secure because they think the college degree will help them to get a job.

Intellectual growth Several interviewees indicated that their time in college contributes to their intellectual growth.

Mona: In coming back to school I was growing intellectually.

Pam: Just expand from where I'm at in the area of horticulture.

Iris: Intellectually stimulating.

Improved self-image Seventeen interviewees mentioned that college makes them feel better about themselves and increases their self-confidence. When asking the interviewees in which way college helps them to feel better about themselves they indicated two factors: college gives them a sense of accomplishment and people at college take them seriously. In the following these two categories are discussed in more detail.

Sense of accomplishment Fourteen out of the 17 interviewees indicated that they feel better about themselves since college provides them with a sense of accomplishment. The interviewees derive their sense of accomplishment from receiving good grades (Amy, Nina, Kathy, Rose, Kirsten, Iris, Jackie, Mona, Lisa, Ginny, Deb, Frances, Ellen), from making progress in their lives (Pam, Michelle), and/or from working toward a degree (Helen, Nina, Jackie).

Being taken seriously Frances and Lisa indicated that college helps them to feel better about themselves because fellow students and professors take them seriously and pay attention to them.

Frances: When you go to school, you talk to other people and professors take you seriously.

A professor invited Lisa to come along to a court hearing. The fact that the professor made her that offer means a great deal to Lisa.

Lisa: I had even a teacher call me at home last week. And of all the students she could have called, she invited me personally . . . and I felt really good. She noticed me . . . there is a reason why she called me and asked me to go.

Besides these two reasons many of the other meanings that the interviewees attribute to college and that are described below may also play a role in making the interviewees feel better about themselves.

Feeling younger Mona, Nina, and Deb indicated that being in college makes them feel younger.

Mona: Just being able to get up and go to different buildings, you know, walking across campus and stuff like that, it makes me feel younger.

Nina: In some ways it was like going through your mid-life crisis. It was time to go back to feeling young again. . . . And when you are together with people who are younger, then you see that they think the same way as you do and that makes you feel younger.

Deb: It is just all the action. The energy level. This is excitement. This is life. And I like that. I think it keeps you younger longer.

Michelle, Jackie, and Iris did not go so far as to say that college makes them feel younger but they emphasized that they very much enjoy being around young people.

Michelle: They treated me as if I was their age or a few years older. It was just like being one of the crowd.

Jackie: The kids are great. . . . Oh, their enthusiasm and just being around young people.

Iris: I would say I like being around people this age - early twenties. So much hope is generated here.

Validation of my thoughts Lisa, Kathy, Sally, and Lori mentioned that college validates their thoughts and shows them that others have had similar experiences as they do. Some examples will be given to illustrate the significance that the validation has for the interviewees.

For Lisa, her classes in child development validated her thoughts on raising children.

Lisa: And when you are in school and when you are interacting with other adults you feel like what you have to say is valuable information because I have experienced it.

For Kathy, her classes in social work lend credence to a family tragedy in her brother's family and to her own experience as a battered wife.

Kathy: So it lends credence to the things that I have experienced. It was really true and not just within my own life but within society.

Further, readings in her women's literature class showed Kathy that she is not the only woman who resents being a mother.

Kathy: Just some of that stuff that I read in that women's literature class . . . and no, not every woman is maternal. I do not feel maternal. . . . I don't feel that my children are the only thing that brings happiness in my life. . . . There is other women out there that feel that way too.

For Sally, her special education class showed her that her learning disorder was not a unique circumstance but something that many children suffer from and that can be treated.

Sally: A lot of time when you are a little kid you think that you are the only one and learning that it is pretty average. It helps. And there is a right way for taking care of it.

For Lori, a social work class validated her thought that "the present is more powerful than the past." This was important for her since letting go of her past, letting go of some bad childhood experiences helps her to go on with her life and to stay mentally healthy. Further, her classes lend credence to her thoughts on factors that influence parenting skills. Being validated means a great deal for Lori since comments of her parents made her believe that something is wrong with her when she was growing up .

Lori: To be validated is important because I kind of felt that I was strange, as if there is something wrong with me. And people would hold me up as an example: She reads all the time, isn't that different. . . . And then they would go so far saying: You shouldn't be that way.

Proving myself As pointed out in the section on "Reasons for enrolling in college" one reason that Deb, Jackie, and Lori enrolled in college was to prove to others and themselves that they can succeed in college. The following quotes show that these interviewees feel that they have reached that goal.

Deb: At the end of my freshman year I was in the upper two percent of my freshman class. I put my certificate on the wall in my office. I framed it and hung it up. Okay guys, read this.

Jackie: I'm proud of myself. . . . It's just that I feel now that I can walk a little taller.

Lori: And when I finished high-school everybody would say: You can't go to college. But I do really well.

As mentioned in the section on "Reasons for enrolling in college," Kathy decided to go to college to get a better-paying job. Her original goal was to get some hands-on training. In the sections on "Childhood experiences" and "Life in the years prior to enrolling in college as adult students" it was described that her mother and the men in her life made her believe that she is not very intelligent. Her good performance in her first years made her examine this perception and change her career plans from a two-year degree to a four-year degree. Further, her good performance in college helped her to prove to her mother and the men in her life that she is capable of more than they thought.

Kathy: Well, when I first started I expected some easy training. I didn't want to study out of books because I didn't think that I could learn out of books. I didn't think I have the capacity. . . . And then that first summer that I went to DMACC I got straight As. Well, then I started thinking, well, maybe I'm not so stupid after all. When I found out that I can be good at this, that's when I started changing my career objectives. . . . I showed her and I showed the guys who said that I was so stupid, I'm not. And I showed myself too. And I think because of all this for any man to ever come in and try to tell me, I'm stupid again, I have the proof (her rewards) hanging on my kitchen wall. I'm not stupid. All my rewards and things. . . . I proved to myself and anybody else - whoever doubted it - that I was capable of doing college work and that I wasn't a stupid person.

A new focus to leave problems behind As mentioned in the chapter on "Reasons for enrolling in college," some interviewees decided to go to college to get away from problems. Other interviewees discovered during their time in college that college gives them a new focus, a new goal that helps them to take their thoughts off problems they were dealing with in their lives.

Iris enrolled in college to leave the nebulous territory behind surrounding the death of her husband. College seems to meet her expectations: Iris stressed at different times during the interview that college gives her focus and hope.

Iris: It (college) makes my head feel good. . . . It gives my life a great deal of focus . . . hope for the future.

In addition, Iris realized that college not only helps her to get away from the nebulous territory but that college can also give her a break from her children, her husband's family, and legal responsibilities connected with settling her husband's estate.

Iris: It is something else to divert my attention to, something else to focus on. . . . This provides a wonderful escape. . . . I'm really glad I have that time because it serves as a buffer. . . . When I go to school I can leave all my problems behind me. . . . I love to say that I can't come for dinner because I have to finish a paper. It serves as excuse to get out of the house, get out of town, get away from the kids, from my husband's family, from whatever.

Like Iris, Helen is a widow. Before her husband died Helen's whole life was centered around her husband and the business he owned. When her husband died she sold the business. As a result of losing the center of her life Helen felt empty. College represents a means to fill the emptiness she experiences.

Helen: So much of my time and energy was devoted to the business and to the marriage. So there is this big void that has to be filled with something.

Frances had and still has marital problems. College gives her a break from thinking about these problems.

Frances: If you sit around and think about something all the time it grows, and it grows, and it grows. . . . Sometimes you got to go and leave it alone and don't worry about it. . . . It was pretty bad for a while until I did get back to school. And then I had something else - I had another outlet. . . . It was a way to get out of the house.

Similarly, Nina indicated that college helps her to leave her problems behind for a short time.

Nina: It takes your mind off during the day. A lot of things that I might worry about, I don't have time to worry about during the day. Like when my son had melanoma, I was so busy that I didn't have time to think about that so much . . . and probably there were times when I argued with my husband and where I was away in school instead of being home all day and thinking about and getting more angry. I didn't have a chance to think about it.

Michelle's favorite subject is math since it has cut and dried answers. Solving math problems gives her a break from trying to deal with problems in her life where the answers are not as straightforward.

Michelle: There is so much disorder in other places, and it is nice to have other things that are cut and dried.

Before Deb enrolled in college she was depressed and unhappy. She did not feel useful for her family since her children were becoming increasingly independent nor did she feel appreciated at work. College represented a positive change. Her own words may illustrate best the meaning Deb attributes to college.

Deb: So I was making changes. Put some quality back in my life. Put something back in my life. . . . And going to school was a recovery. . . . I see it as the first step in a recovery process from whoever this person had become who was allowing herself to just sit around and be beaten in the ground by . . . whatever.

Similarly, Sally was very depressed before she enrolled in college. School gave her a new goal and helps her to feel better about herself.

Sally: And I started to feel better, more and more and more. It helped me to be spontaneous again, to be able to get up in the morning. . . . My life then was either trying to make things okay or just end it all. . . . I had to start over and change, start from grassroots. . . . I guess I need something to hang on to.

A further example of how college can help to take one's mind off one's problems is Ginny's experience: At the time when her daughter's marriage was breaking up, Ginny was enrolled in many classes. Being busy with college helped her to get her mind off her daughter's marital problem. But college has been and is even more important for Ginny for dealing with her own marital problems. Ginny expressed repeatedly in both interviews that college is her whole focus, her whole life. College represents stability for her and gives her the appreciation she is lacking in her marriage. The following quotes show that her whole life centers around college and college alone.

Ginny: School is the only focus of my life, my goals, my dreams, my desires and everybody else must be on hold because I'm not giving it up. . . . I felt better about it than about anything that I have done in my life. . . . School gives me something back; marriage, children there is no pay-back. When I'm in school, I'm pursuing something for me . . . it's the only meaningful time for me. . . . School is a wonderful rock in the middle and all these crises are going on and that rock is stable . . . I don't look to my husband for stability. . . . (one semester when she didn't go to school): I wish I had been in school because what he was doing, didn't have as much impact, even though it was hurting and stuff - didn't have as much impact as the loss I was receiving from me not being in school.

Identity issues For some interviewees going to college plays a role in defining or redefining their identity. In some cases, particular classes or projects helped the interviewees examine their self-image and their beliefs, in other cases, being in college and succeeding in college in general made the interviewees revalidate their views of themselves and their beliefs.

Frances, Ginny, and Michelle indicated that college helps them to become their own persons. Frances mentioned that college helped her to break the codependency on her husband.

Frances: For me it was important to see that not everything what he says is always true. . . . It made me understand that what is going on with him really has no bearing on me. That his life is here (she was pointing at one side of the table) and my life is here (she was pointing at the other side of the table) and that it cannot be enmeshed. First I had a tendency to take responsibility for everything that was going on, my stuff and his stuff. And it drives you down and when you finally sit down and say: This is yours, then you change. . . . Oh, I think it probably definitely helped

getting the enmeshment broken - get my codependency broken . . . because it validated me as a person so instead of thinking I was an extension of him I became my own person.

Similarly, Ginny expects that college will help her to get her own life back by becoming independent and regaining her thoughts and feelings.

Ginny: Maybe school is going to give me freedom and I don't know whether it would be freedom from my husband or freedom from the chains that bound me - from the restrictions. . . . If I compared it with the search of God, I guess I would think that people that have God are free - once they find him. Once I found whatever I was looking for I'm going to be free. . . . I really don't have the chains any more. Maybe if a person has an education, they don't owe anybody anything. . . . If a person has an education, they have determination, they are free. They can take care of themselves. It's about independence maybe. . . . When a person is codependent they don't think any more. They totally don't think. They shut their minds off, and they only think what the other person gives them. And to me that's what a codependent woman is, somebody that doesn't think. She just has feelings that he gives her, the thoughts he gives her to think. . . . A codependent woman, she is limited. The more she knows, her vision gets broader.

Ginny mentioned that college helps her to lose her fear and to become more self-confident which in turn is necessary for getting out of a codependent relationship.

Ginny: And there are projects that are scary for me. . . . And once I go do it, it is an accomplishment. And it is all things that are baby steps that get a person to a level, but you have to overcome the fear. . . . I think all these little building blocks give you confidence to try the next step. . . . When you have been in a codependent relationship you can't just get out of it . . . and you allow these chains to be put on you, and you take these off, it takes baby steps. You don't know how to do it any more, you don't know how to think any more . . . you don't even have the confidence to try to do these things any more. It takes baby steps. If you have to look ahead in a year from then and you say: I wanna be here. You can't because you can't imagine you could do those things. So the only way for me, it takes baby steps, a lot of little accomplishments to encourage me to do the next. And sometimes I'm so afraid of it, really afraid. And I almost cry with fear but then I have to talk myself actually into it.

College provides Ginny an opportunity to explore herself. For this reason not the degree itself but going to college is important to her. The degree and getting a job later on is more important for justifying her college attendance to one of her sons and her husband.

Ginny: I explore a lot of things that I'm cooky about. . . . I would take more time to explore more and I would probably try more things. . . . I would like to find out who I am. . . . The education process is what is most important to me. . . . The job is probably more for other people than it is for me. . . . My husband and oldest son would think: There is a deficiency some place, if somebody goes to college and not go to work.

Another interviewee that is in the process of reestablishing her identity is Michelle. Before enrolling in college Michelle did not see herself as an autonomous person; she defined herself as her husband's wife and as her children's Mom. Interacting with people who only knew her but not her family, who did not have any preconceived notions of who she is or who she should be, made her discover that she is her own person.

Michelle: And when I went to school they didn't know anybody but me and so I was just me . . . discovering that yeah I was a person. . . . They didn't know me, and there were no preconceived notions of who I should be. And I guess I started trying to decide who do I want to be. . . . And I didn't feel all the time I had to live up to what other people thought who I was. I felt more free to do what was right and not what somebody else said.

Further, different exercises in an interpersonal communication class helped Michelle to focus more on her feelings and desires. One of the exercises made her realize that how she sees herself differs from the image other people have of her.

Michelle: And maybe I started paying a little more attention to myself and trying to decide what I wanted and not what everybody else told me that I wanted . . . a lot of them viewed themselves different as to what other people viewed them, and it made me realize how little we really know about how other people see you.

In a literature class Michelle was reading a story about animals with human characteristics. Michelle felt especially attracted to a horse since it acted differently from the other horses: It treated everybody as an individual and not as a member of a group.

Michelle: There was one of them that wasn't like the rest of them, that maybe being different wasn't such a horrible thing after all. And we shouldn't just assume that everybody acts like that. . . . He didn't generalize so much. All the rest of them were generalizing. He sort of dealt with individuals rather than groups, and it was kind of nice.

The identity of a person consists of the values and beliefs that the person holds. One segment of beliefs are religious views. In a class on Greek mythology Michelle learned that there are many similarities between stories about Greek gods and goddesses and Bible stories. This realization made her examine her own religious beliefs.

Michelle: It has made me think a lot about my beliefs . . . certain figures in mythology appear not only in Greek mythology but also in Middle Eastern and Egyptian, and these things overlap, and then you see the Biblical references that match with that. . . . It really makes you look at your own beliefs, and you see it is just the same thing. . . . It was kind of an eye-opener . . . and I'm not sure any more about what I do believe.

Deb is another interviewee that uses college as a means to explore herself. As mentioned in the section "Life experiences immediately prior to enrolling in college as adult students" Deb felt belittled and looked down upon at work. The behavior of the people she was working with had made her believe that she is not okay, that she is "a little non-entity." Obtaining very good grades in her first year in college made her question this self-image.

Deb: And I decided I'm not this person that they let me to believe that I might be. I be whatever I want to be. And maybe I should see what I want to be.

Deb mentioned that she tends to identify with characters in movies or books. She sometimes has a wish to be the portrayed person. Further, she

indicated that she is very "reader response" which means that she reads a story and then she examines what she personally thinks about what she had read. As a consequence, Deb makes use of her readings to examine her personal views. For example, a book she read made her think about the image of the perfect woman. Deb mentioned that her parents raised her as an "ornament," and one part of herself still wants to be an ornament. At the same time she admires the female character in the book.

Deb: She was strong, very positive, very sure about what she wanted, very confident. . . . I think you envy somebody that is that sure in what they want. . . . And you read it and you figure, in there may be the clue to what you need to do. . . . If you would take the strength of her character and Scarlet - Scarlet is an ornament - you get this perfect woman.

Deb especially likes books by American female writers. Again, she hopes to find a role model in one of the books of these writers, more specifically, she is looking for someone who might help her to come to terms with something, not indicating what "something" might be.

Deb: And if you look back to these writers you are gonna find a role model somewhere in there, somebody who might help you over . . . something. I think literature is one way of looking what is going on in women's mind, and maybe a way to find somebody that may provide guidance for what you are doing.

In a social work class Deb learned that people who grow up in a culture of poverty don't think that they can do anything to change their situation. Deb recognized that she was following the same behavior pattern at her former workplace: from the way her coworkers treated her she concluded that she is a "little non-entity" and that she can't do anything to change that.

Deb: And I think there is something to it that if you grow up in that environment, you start after a while, you start what I was doing . . . I start to believe that you can't do anything. And so I awakened up more to that, that I did too, that they are feeling exactly what I did. It's a different subject but it is the same what I did.

Deb took the same class on Greek mythology as Michelle did. Like Michelle, Deb noticed the commonalties among stories in mythology. This realization in turn increased her doubts about God.

Deb: There is a lot of parallels between the gods and goddesses and Jesus and Mary. . . . I think I don't believe. . . . Our religion is not the only religion because you can see the parallels. It is just a different culture. . . . They are not any different from what we are doing right now. . . . I started to question it years ago and seeing it all show up in the gods, it makes sense. It is a wonderful idea. And it would be nice if there is a heaven up there, and we are all around and having a good time. I guess I can't really buy into it.

A social work class made Deb examine the way she treated poor people. The class forced her to acknowledge that there are people who live a very miserable life. As a consequence of that class Deb developed a more lenient attitude toward poor people. She considers now almost all poor people as "deserving poor" whereas before taking that class she distinguished between "deserving and undeserving poor." Further, she made a charitable donation as a result of her changed views.

Deb: There is a certain acknowledgment forced upon you. . . . And instead of looking at the undeserving poor now I think they are all deserving poor - they are not all but I tend to look more that way. . . . But it also forced me to change some things I did. Last year on Christmas there was a donation that was given in the boys name.

Ellen has a multicultural background. She indicated that classes that deal with multicultural issues help her to learn about herself. One example she gave was about a woman in Virginia. One of the ancestors of this woman was Afro-American and thus the woman was treated by the society as being Afro-American. Ellen made the same experience: She is one part Afro-American and the society considers her Afro-American neglecting all other cultures that she is a part of.

Ellen: There is a case of some woman in Virginia and she has been white all her life but somehow way back in her lineage there was some black relative, and so I think it worked out that she is 1/16 black so all the records of that woman say she is black. . . . It is like with me: I'm

African-American, Indian, Spanish, Irish but according to our society I'm black and . . . and so I say I'm black. It's almost like saying those other parts aren't important.

Further school helps Ellen to learn about her capabilities.

Ellen: By returning to school I realized the potential that I have inside of myself and that makes me feel good that I learned that I'm capable of more than I thought I was . . . and that's what I mean by exploring and doing different things - making discoveries.

A special education class helped Sally to look at her childhood experiences from a new perspective. Sally had many problems in grade school. Her problems remained untreated. As a consequence Sally grew up under the impression that she was "bad," and that is something she still has to fight with. In her class on special education she learned about children with learning disabilities and behavioral problems. She realized that she herself showed many symptoms of children with learning disabilities and behavioral problems when she was a child. She learned that her problems as a child may be responsible for the depression she experiences. Further she found out that there are many children who have such problems and that these problems can be treated. This made her understand that she is not the only one who had such a problem and that she should have received some treatment as a child, and more important, she realized that she is not "bad."

Sally: Special education had a lot of meaning for me because I recognized myself in a lot of things . . . learning disabilities and that kind of thing, emotional disturbances and behavior problems, that meant a lot to me because I could see myself in that even as a child. . . . One thing we learned in this class is that a lot of children who have learning disabilities can end up with depression and mental disorders and things like that because of the frustration. So that meant a lot to me. . . . I had a lot of problems in grade school. . . . And I thought I was the only one and I found out that this is an average thing. . . . It helped to put my perspective on it. And not just to forget it or to take it out of my life but come to grips with certain things like about things in my past life. Through school I have been able to go on, not to keep wrapped up in the old stuff, looking at a future, being able to see the past, the pain. I think what education has done is to get past this stuff and see that things can be good. . . . Learning that this is not a problem I had but a situation I had.

Cutting down on the self-blame. I still have a problem with that. . . . This a condition you had. This is not something you had because you are bad or good. This is something that should be taken care of the right way. This is not something you should be kicked for.

Part of her feeling of being "bad" originated from her strict education in a Catholic school. As a child she learned that the Pope is perfect. Sally developed the notion that she has to be perfect too, and if she wasn't, she is "bad." Learning in a world history class about the corruption in the Church and the reasons for the break-up of the Church made her realize that the Church is not perfect, and that it is okay to make mistakes.

Sally: Religion is a big thing for me and we had that preached into us, a lot of fear about religion. I think that learning about true things and having big question marks answered like what were the real things that led up to the break-up of the Church. . . . Anything that I learned about the Church was wrong. We had a big thing about being perfect. We talked about the Pope and that he is so perfect. It gives you a feeling of being bad. I think that things were picked out for us, that everybody should go on a pedestal and be so perfect. . . . Learning about a lot of corruption in the Church. . . . It is nice to learn that it is okay to make mistakes. I learned facts like what lead to the break-up of the Church. . . . I think I had a real struggle between good and bad.

For Jackie college provides an opportunity to find out what she wants to do with the rest of her life.

Jackie: But now I think I want to do my own thing if I figure out what that is. . . . If I ever grow up. I haven't decided what I want to be yet when I grow up. I think people make decisions early in life that this is what they are gonna do and never stop to look at it half way through twenty years into the job. Are they really doing what they want to do? . . . And I guess I'm still trying to find a career.

Examination of issues The interviewees mentioned different issues that they examined during their time in college. The following subcategories have been developed out of the given examples: relationship issues, gender issues, my children's problems, death of a family member, homosexuality, abortion, status

of a professor, other issues. In the following the subcategories will be discussed in more detail:

Relationship issues For example, a class on interpersonal communication helped Michelle realize that there was a communication problem between her and her husband.

Michelle: The interpersonal communication class that I took that was the semester we separated. . . . That was really hard because a lot of our homework involved using your family as sounding boards. I guess I realized nobody was paying attention to me. . . . It was kind of an eye-opener for me to see how other families communicated and how mine did and didn't. And it made me think what my expectations of communication were and whether they were so valid and maybe I should rethink my expectations. . . . It made me realize how I based on what other people said on how I felt about it, and I didn't always stop to listen to what they were saying, what made them say it. It made me understand better why the communication with my husband, well, why we didn't communicate.

In a sociology class Nicole came to understand the role she was playing when she was working with handicapped people.

Nicole: And I had started to work with mentally handicapped people, and it was real interesting to me, the roles we play - structural-functionalism and that perspective, and how people are ingrained in those roles and that was real impressive.

Further, a social work class helped her understand her former work experience with social service agencies.

Nicole: Well, recently I'm doing a social work class, and it has to do with policy examination and how different agencies interface. That has been real interesting to me because I have been in those positions and had to work with some of those agencies and my professor called it the "Aha" experience, and yeah now I see what is going on.

Further Nicole examined the way her father had interacted with the rest of the family.

Nicole: And the classes helped me to understand that he was more of an autocratic father and I didn't think he was when I was growing up. I thought we were a "Mom and apple pie" kind of family until things started happening.

A poem she read helped Deb examine her feelings toward her father.

Deb: What I liked so much about Maria Antonia is the relationship my father and I had for years. It was stormy. I used to wish he would die. I couldn't listen any more to all that criticism and yelling. And when you stop and think, it is a good thing, he didn't die because I would have been angry. And I would have thought I have done it. I killed him. And that's what I think this poem said too in there. She had done something, and he died because she had. . . . You know. Yeah, there is little bits of me that show up in those things.

Gender issues Several interviewees - Nina, Michelle, Kathy, Nicole, Ellen, Lisa - examined gender issues during their time in school.

Nina became more supportive for equal rights for men and women.

Nina: There was one time when I wasn't sure women had a right going out there and asserting themselves quite so much. And now I'm asserting myself a little more. So I turned around there too. I voted "yes" on the ERA. I wouldn't have eight years ago.

Further Nina started to question why women are not in top positions even though that there are many well educated women in society.

Nina: Doing a little bit research on some things, over and over again I would find that as you started looking at any structure it didn't matter where it was - in the college itself - that women were holding lower positions. . . . I really had never thought about it. I really didn't. I think I accepted that. . . . Maybe I thought there weren't many capable women out there and that's why they weren't in these positions. And I don't feel that this is true. . . . And now I started to question why women are not at the top.

Nina and Michelle think that females are not encouraged or even discouraged to pursue science careers. Both interviewees plan on promoting females in science later on.

Nina: And science is my area of specialization. Especially girls in the classroom, they are being left out. They are feeling incapable that they are able to do math or science by the time they are in fifth grade.

Michelle: Girls tend to shut out technical careers at an early age and some of it is not consciously done. And some people are not aware of the signals they are sending but the little kids pick these things up. If a woman wants to go on to a technical career I think she should. And you can do it as good as the boys can. And I want to get involved in that kind of thing. I push my daughter really hard, take all those math classes and science classes. I don't care if you get a C in home ec but take the math, take the science.

In her class on Greek mythology Michelle learned that females were considered a punishment for men. Further, writing a paper on witchcraft she found out that the myth of witches was used by men to get rid of women. These two experiences made Michelle realize that the discrimination of women has been going on for a long time.

Michelle: They said women are the punishment to men. . . . It didn't surprise me. Women had the kind of type of garbage image. A man is strong. If a woman is strong she is a bitch. It is so ingrained from ancient times. . . . We had to write a paper on something and I chose witchcraft. . . . I'm not a real radical feminist but it was another way of men who are threatened by women, trying to get rid of them. And that was eye-opening.

Michelle admires the goddess Harthina since she is able to deal with men in a men's world. Michelle is studying a field where most of the students are male. Thus Harthina may be a role model for Michelle for relating to her overwhelmingly male fellow students in her daily life.

Michelle: I like the female goddesses because they could be strong, especially Harthina but she was not seen as in a derogatory way so much. Harthina she was strong and she could deal with men in a men's world but she didn't overreact as the others. She didn't act to get men doing things for her. If I'm gonna work in a man's world, I'm gonna be more on men's term and don't try to take advantage of the fact that I'm female but deal with them as equals.

Kathy had some bad experiences with men in her life: she was battered by her husband. Her brother abused his wife. Due to these experiences topics dealing with women's issues are important to Kathy as the following quote illustrates.

Kathy: One class that sticks out in my mind - a women's lit class and the papers that I got to write in there, and the stories, essays, and poems were written by women throughout history, those started me thinking more along the lines that women can do it and that women were just as good. . . . In the "Sex and Gender" class. We went through the section on man's power and how men perceive how it is their right or it is expected that they can batter women or that they can rape women and I lived through that. And not only that but also relating it to what happened with my brother and thinking back to how our father was and kind of piecing all these different things together. And I might be completely off base but in the book it says that an abused child will grow up to be an abuser, the way my father beat up my brother and my brother beat up his wife you can see how that circle goes full circle. . . . But this essay that this Catholic nun wrote was that it makes more sense to look upon God as mother instead of father. God nurtures us and nurtures the earth. When you are in pain, when you are a little kid, when you are in pain you go to your mother for love and kisses and hugs. And when we are in pain we go to God the father, that doesn't make sense. But somehow or other this patriarchal system that we live under has switched that all around so that God is father. So when I read that I thought: Hhmm. It does make sense. Women really do a lot of things. We just don't have the recognized power. . . . So when I read the different chapters and articles, it angers me that there are still women out there that are getting beat up and that they have to leave their home sometimes with nothing but the clothes on their back and go away and hide in shelters.

In a lecture on "Women in Theology" Nicole learned that historically women played an important role in theology. This information strengthens her view that the Catholic Church is discriminating against women.

Nicole: The women in theology thing. It gives you a different perspective on women's history. I think the Catholic Church is real demeaning to women. . . . And the theologian was talking that historically women have been on the forefront of theology and that they were honored and the leaders of religious circles. I didn't know that and that makes you kind of think about some of those things that have changed, like men being the focus of religion. It hasn't always been that way.

Ellen learned about the origin of the inequality between men and women.

Ellen: Actually it started splitting up in the hunting and gathering society. . . . But anyway, in the hunting gathering it was more equal. The problems started emerging in the agrarian. In the agrarian, the man had to start moving away, and the woman had to stay home because of the child-rearing and child-bearing. The men started developing more power, they were controlling the land and the wealth.

Lisa became aware in which way role expectations influence the treatment of boys and girls.

Lisa: I did a paper on gender bias and stereotyping. . . . And just doing the research made me realize, yeah, we do treat boys and girls differently. But also this realization that in the classroom we need to do the best I can to make sure that boys and girls know that they can succeed and that they can be involved in each other's activities.

My children's problems Her sociology classes made Nicole look at relationships with family members from a new perspective. For example, counseling a female student of her daughter's age helped her to better understand the point of view of her daughter.

Nicole: And we had this class where you had to counsel another person and I was assigned to that young girl. . . . She is like 22. And I have one daughter that is 22, and one that is 19. And I started to look at things from their perspective. She gave me a different perspective.

Being a student herself helped Kirsten to become more understanding of the difficulties her children experience in school.

Kirsten: It's made me even more accepting of my kids. . . . It used to be very important to me that my kids did everything just exactly like they were supposed to in school, and then I think since I came back - and maybe it's because I'm busy or maybe because I understand the struggles they go through - I'm a lot more accepting. Well, you didn't do so well on this paper or something. It is easier for me to accept that.

One of Mona's daughters has a speech problem. Communication classes helped Mona to understand better her daughter's speech difficulties.

Mona: I was able to take two communication classes. They were really interesting to me because I have been working - or had the possibility of working with special needs children with communication disorders. Plus the experience with my daughter - my daughter's needs were that she had a speech and language delay, and so she hadn't picked up all the language. She had some hearing problems. So I was really into speech and language problems. So those two classes were really interesting to me. Being able to personally reflect on it and everything too.

Death of a family member The man Kathy was living with had died a short time before she started college. One of the first papers she wrote was on the living will to explore the issue of prolonging life artificially.

Kathy: It was still pretty soon after the man I was living with had died. And I believe in why prolong life if you can end the suffering. Why not somebody just allow to die peacefully and die without technology interfering, and I wanted to find out more about it and what are the different view points.

Homosexuality Kathy, Lori, Ellen, and Lisa indicated that during their time in college, they examined their views on homosexuality.

Kathy: We were reading poems written by lesbians. . . . Why should their sexuality make a difference whether they serve in the army, whether they teach my children? . . . This whole gay rights movement goes really under my skin. . . . And I would like to - some day if I ever felt I have time - get involved in the gay and lesbian rights.

Lori: I have always sympathized with gays and lesbians although I have never really been active involved in any action, and yet when they have their coming out day, to be able to go to their speeches and show support is real important to me.

Ellen: I take a soc class this semester on all those different social issues and about gay teachers as role models, and we were on the "yes" and on the "no" panel. Just because somebody is different does not give you the right to go around and denying them their human rights.

Lisa: You get the exposure and the chance to talk to someone who is different from how you are. And whether or not you agree with their

lifestyle, it is still okay to maybe hear how they feel and maybe why they feel like they do.

Abortion issue The discussion in her political science class and the readings for that class made Nina modify her stand on the abortion issue.

Nina: I was an adamant right to life. And in some ways I still am. I may not be quite as adamant. I see some exceptions. . . . Reading things on my own and reading things in the textbook. And I learned about the court case "Row versus Wade." If I were sitting on the supreme court . . . how would I have decided? . . . At least I'm keeping more of an open mind. Before I had a closed mind. I don't care what, you don't have an abortion. And that's the way I felt.

Status of a professor Her experiences in college made Kirsten examine her image of professors.

Kirsten: It also made me realize that these professors and stuff are just people. And I don't necessarily think of them as highly as I used to. I used to think they were above the rest of us and they are just people. . . . I have seen them making mistakes, where before I guess when I was right out of high school, they seemed like such authoritative figures and now I realize you can talk to them, and you can have friendships with them and stuff. And maybe again that goes back to building my own self-esteem as far as seeing myself a little higher.

Other issues Other issues that the interviewees mentioned to have thought about during their time in college were the following: mandatory retirement, history of the United States, current situation of the United States, American government, interdependence among countries, group behavior, role of education in oppression, conflict, view of teaching, death, and dying.

Improving communication skills College helped several interviewees to improve their communication skills. As mentioned in the section "Examining of relationships," Michelle reviewed her expectations about interpersonal communication and became aware of her own communication skills in one of her classes. Nina learned to give "I" instead of "You" messages when talking with

her family. Kathy mentioned that her classes helped her to understand conflict, and this knowledge helps her to avoid arguments. Lori indicated that college helped her to articulate her thoughts better and to respond in a more thoughtful way. Having to communicate with different types of people in college helped Mona to improve her communication skills.

Obtaining knowledge necessary for leading "intelligent" conversations

Kirsten, Pam, Deb, and Kathy think that college provided them with the background knowledge for being able to participate in "intelligent" conversations.

Opening up to others College helped Michelle and Frances to open up to other people.

Michelle: I was not used to telling people how I really felt, what I really wanted, what I really felt myself to be, and I always was what they wanted me to be doing. . . . I was less afraid to do that after that. I wasn't quite so afraid of letting people see what was me, and I felt I could be more open about who I am.

Frances: And going back to college I opened up to other people.

Other general effects The interviewees mentioned several other, more general effects that college had on them. The following categories have been established and will be discussed in the following: increased tolerance, more interested in the world, increased interest in learning, less intimidated, and more skeptical.

Increased tolerance Many interviewees - Deb, Helen, Kirsten, Kathy, Jacky, Mona, Lisa, Michelle, Nina, Lori, Nicole, Ellen - indicated that college provided them with opportunities to look at issues from different perspectives which in turn helped them to become more tolerant and more understanding of people from different backgrounds and cultures. Kirsten, Helen, and Jackie pointed out that multicultural classes and interacting with international students made them recognize the commonalties among different cultures.

More interested in the world Pam, Nina, Kirsten, and Jackie indicated that they are now more interested in the world than they were prior to enrolling in college.

Increased interest in learning Twelve interviewees indicated that going to college increased their interest in learning. Nina, Mona, and Deb mentioned that they could go to college for the rest of their lives. Eight interviewees - Deb, Frances, Ginny, Jackie, Lisa, Nina, Pam, Lori - indicated that they want to go on to graduate school right after they will have obtained their bachelor's degree. Kirsten, Mona, Pam, and Michelle plan to go to graduate school after they will have worked for some years .

Less intimidated Lisa and Jackie gave examples how understanding issues better or being exposed to them can take away fear. For example, working with handicapped children helped Lisa to be less frightened about them.

Lisa: And I have been volunteering Monday nights to work with handicapped children. It started out as kind of a result of one of the classes I took. And I have never been around handicapped children at all, and I was very nervous about taking care of these children. . . . And not having had the opportunity before to work with them I was always very afraid, and now I can look at them and see they may be disabled in some areas but they still smile, they still are very loving, and they still need the kinds of things that your normal children need.

Learning about other countries and their governments helped Jackie to be less frightened about other nations.

Jackie: My view of the world is more friendly, it's less intimidating because I feel I understand a little more.

More skeptical Nina, Lori, and Michelle pointed out that their experiences in college made them more questioning.

No major effect Eight interviewees - Amy, Rose, Pam, Pat, Helen, Nina, Kathy, Jackie - mentioned that their time in college did not have any major effect on their beliefs or views. College is only important in that it prepares them for their professional lives. Most of the interviewees who made that statement were also the ones who mentioned that they expect that their degree will give them a better paying job or a job with more responsibilities.

Do the interviewees participate in college activities outside the classroom?

All interviewees indicated that they do not have time to participate in college activities outside the classroom. Commuting, family responsibilities, and their involvement in activities in their home communities do not allow them to spend more time at the university than necessary for fulfilling their degree requirements.

What were significant non-college related experiences of the interviewees?

In the course of the interview several female adult students reported significant experiences that they made during the time they went to college but that were not related to college life.

Frances has marital problems. Her husband is an alcohol. In her distress she went to a support group for family members of alcoholics. This group helped Frances to become comfortable with herself and keeps her going.

Frances: I think it is self-validating to hear other people's stories and know that people have felt the way you felt before, and you are not alone, and you are not strange. That helped me. That made me to be comfortable with myself. Because when you grow up, you are never really sure, what is okay, and what isn't, and my mother never really told me that. There was always this element of secrecy and when you get into social situations sometimes you don't know, is this really the way you should act or not. And you try to bluff your way through it. And when I went to (A.A.), it gave me a sense that other people do feel this way. . . . It (A.A.) is really important to me. It keeps my sanity. . . . It keeps my serenity. . . . It helps keep me focused because they tell you: Don't live tomorrow, don't live yesterday, live today.

A retreat experience made Nicole work through some painful issues in her relationship with her former husband.

Nicole: And it was really a catharsis type of weekend. . . . It was real validating. . . . I did a lot of crying and everybody does. . . . Addressing issues with my ex-husband. I thought that was all settled, and we have a good relationship now like friends but there is still a lot of . . . I want him to apologize for the things he had done. And the big thing that got me is that they have you write a letter, a forgiveness or a good-bye, and that was a great letter.

What effect does college have on the family of the interviewee?

Almost all interviewees indicated that their family is their first priority and that school follows second. School takes time away from the family. The interviewees indicated that they feel guilty toward their family for not spending enough time with it. Further they pointed out that their time in school represents a stressful period for the whole family since other family members have to take over some of the tasks the interviewees carried out before. However, distributing household tasks among family members might also have positive effects. Amy, Nina, Pam, and Mona assume that their children became more responsible and independent by having to participate in household work. Ellen and Helen take their children to the university once in a while so that their children get to experience university life and thus may be less afraid of going to college. In addition several interviewees - Helen, Lori, Lisa, Kirsten, Mona, Pam - expressed that they hope to be a good role model for their children by going to college and succeeding in college. Kathy and Michelle mentioned that they try to pass on to their children some of the knowledge they learn in college.

Do the interviewees experience advantages over traditional students?

The interviewees mentioned that there are some advantages connected with going to school as an adult student as compared to as traditional undergraduate student.

Amy and Deb share the opinion that adult students receive special attention from their instructors.

Amy: They will ask you for a little input on well: What do you think will improve the class?

Deb: You can see after a while the instructor is teaching to the adult students more so than to traditional students. It almost seems that way. We go to class every day. We do the homework. We do the readings. We are prepared. We are not afraid to open our mouth and say what we think. And if it's wrong, we take a chance. It's usually not because we have done the readings, and we are prepared. And I think that makes a difference and after a while you can just - the person who is directing the class - they kind of focus in on you a little bit more because you are interested.

Several interviewees mentioned that adult students may have an advantage over traditional students for the following reasons: adult students are more mature, have a stronger work ethic, receive support from their family (Amy), have a clear goal (Kirsten), have less peer pressure (Lori), have less social distractions like parties, friends (Amy, Kirsten), and their work and life experiences can help them to understand their classes (Amy, Kirsten, Nicole, Lisa).

Are there any issues the interviewees are dissatisfied with?

A few interviewees are dissatisfied with parts of their university experience. Pam has the impression that the university doesn't pay enough attention to the special concerns of adult students.

Pam: I feel the university, a lot of time, they don't see us adult students. Child care is a problem. The other thing that really irritates me, everyone has to go to orientation. And these orientation classes are just specifically for freshmen just out of high-school, first time away from home. It is really a waste of my time and hear how to solve roommate problems. The health care options on campus are not very good. And also some of my required classes are at eight o'clock in the morning, and they are offered at no other time. And I can't be here. That would mean I have to leave my children to get ready for school alone.

Rose thinks that some faculty members do not accept and understand female adult students that want to get a college degree to advance in their careers.

Rose: I feel like the students accept you more than certain faculty members accept you. . . . I have found out that many faculty members that are about your age they don't understand what you are doing there.

They have their careers, and they did what they wanted to do and many of the college professors that are in my age are in the peak of their career and they are just holding on until they are gonna retire. And they have no anticipation of doing anything different. They do not want to go out in the real world and work with a company and they do not understand someone who is in the same position as they are in life, agewise, wanting to make these big changes unless they have to. They understand some of the students who are doing it for financial reasons, for a better job, some of the single mothers who have small children. But they don't understand why other people want to do it. And I have been in situations where I really felt that they look at you and they don't dare to say it, so I can't give you any specifics but it is like: What is she doing here?

Further Rose thinks that the instructors do not take under consideration that adult students and traditional undergraduate students may have different needs. Rose gave an example of an English composition class and a biology class that she took.

Rose: They geared the material and the reading material and writing material so much to the 20 and 22 years old. It was really ridiculous some of that stuff I had to write about. We were given a three to four page article in class, and we had to write a summary of it. This article was about a rock group. It was very geared to the age of the younger students. I took a biology class. They go into that stuff that is geared to a 20 to 22 years old. The last two sessions were on childbirth. I have my family, and I went through all this. I could maybe better explain it than the teacher did.

Lori indicated that some faculty members treat the adult students like traditional undergraduate students.

Lori: And the instructor came in, and he had us sit in seating charts. They were treating us as if we would all be 18 years old. . . . I felt like I had to regress to become a little kid again. Maybe that's what you have to be able to do.

Rose, Amy, Lisa, and Mona think that some of the classes they are required to take or projects they have to carry out are unnecessary.

Rose: With many of the classes I feel like I got to this point in my life without this, like sociology classes and science classes that you have to have. I wonder do I really need this? I don't need this for my job.

Amy: Some of my non-curriculum courses like history and the English - I don't have a lot of patience for those. . . . I just don't feel that they focus on what is important for me.

Lisa: And sometimes I really get upset about all the little projects that the teacher wants us to do. In some of my classes I'm as old as the teacher and in some of them I'm older. I get real disgusted with all the little projects we have to do. It seems such a waste of time. When you are my age you have had these experiences already but I feel the push to keep learning in other ways like reading journals, going to conferences and things like that.

Mona: Some of the projects that don't make sense, that aren't gonna be of that much value. . . . That math class. The reason why I didn't like it was because I had a hard time to see how it would fit in to what I was gonna be doing. It didn't seem like anything that would apply. That made it tough.

What plans do the interviewees have for the time after graduation?

As mentioned in the section on "Meanings attributed to the College Experience" under "Increased Interest in Learning" eight interviewees plan to go on for a graduate degree after they will have finished their bachelor's degree. Fourteen interviewees - Amy, Ellen, Helen, Iris, Kirsten, Mona, Nina, Pam, Rose, Sally, Kathy, Michelle, Nicole, Pat - intend to join the labor force. Kirsten, Pam, Mona, and Michelle mentioned that they might go back for a graduate degree after they will have worked for a few years. Jackie plans on traveling with her husband after he will be retired. In addition, Jackie is interested in working for a political party at the grassroots level.

Summary

In this chapter the information that the female adult students shared in the interviews was presented in the form of themes and categories. The interviews focused on the lives of the female adult students prior to enrolling in college, their reasons for enrolling in college, their reasons for enrolling in college at this point in time, the reactions of friends and family members to their decision to go to college, their experiences in college, and their plans after graduation. Knowing what life was like for the female adult students prior to

enrolling in college, what made them to decide to enroll in college at this point in their lives, and what meanings they attribute to their college experience is important for assessing the transformative effect of the educational experiences on female adult students. Thus the information provided in this chapter is necessary for answering the research question of the study: Are the educational experiences of female adult students transformative experiences? Answering this question based on the information obtained in the interviews is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to identify whether the educational experiences of female adult students facilitate perspective transformations. Mezirow (1991) refers to perspective transformation as the process of becoming aware of the context and origin of one's meaning perspective, of critically reflecting on the supporting arguments for one's meaning perspective, of changing one's meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative meaning perspective, and finally of acting on one's new meaning perspective. Meaning perspectives are the set of habitual expectations and assumptions that people use to interpret and evaluate the meaning of their experiences. Perspective transformations can be initiated by a traumatic event in the life of a person (e.g. death, illness, divorce), by an eye-opening discussion, book, or poem, or in general, by any experience that does not coincide with our expectations or perspectives and therefore lacks meaning for us. The inconsistency between our experience and our meaning perspectives may stimulate us to examine the reasons and supporting arguments for our meaning perspectives to assess whether these meaning perspectives are justified. In the examination process, meaning perspectives may be negated or revised, and new meaning perspectives may be developed.

For this study twenty female adult students were interviewed about their educational experiences in college. The interviewees shared parts of their life before enrolling in college, their reasons for enrolling in college, their experiences in college, and their plans for the future. In the previous chapter the themes and categories that evolved out of the interviews were presented. One of the categories focused on the meanings the interviewees attribute to their educational experiences in college. This category serves as the foundation for discussing whether and to what degree the educational experiences of these female adult students facilitated a perspective transformation. However, information categorized under other themes and categories is also important for determining the transformative potential of the educational experiences of the female adult students. For example, information categorized under "Childhood experiences," "Life experiences immediately prior to enrolling in college as adult

students," and "Reasons for enrolling in college" may help to identify the meaning perspectives that the females held prior to enrolling in college as well as the origin of these meaning perspectives.

Discussion of Findings

In the following the findings of the study are presented and discussed. Quotes from the interviewees are used to illustrate the findings.

The female adult students experienced different types of learning

Educational experiences can be differentiated according to their learning domain. As mentioned in the literature review, Mezirow (1991) distinguishes three domains of cognitive interest: the instrumental domain, the communicative domain, and the emancipatory domain. The instrumental domain refers to learning how to do something. Communicative learning means learning to understand what others mean and to make ourselves understood. The emancipatory domain is the domain of perspective transformation. Emancipatory learning means to test the validity of one's meaning perspectives. Thus educational experiences of a transformative nature are part of the emancipatory domain of learning.

Some female adult students were only involved in instrumental and communicative learning during their time in college whereas others experienced emancipatory learning as well. An example of a female adult student that only experienced instrumental and communicative learning is Rose. In her accounting class she learned how to develop budgets (instrumental learning) and in her business communication class she learned how to write business letters (communicative learning). However, her interviews did not provide any evidence that she negotiated meaning perspectives. Thus she was not involved in emancipatory learning. A female adult student that did experience emancipatory learning is Deb. Prior to enrolling in college Deb felt useless and looked down upon at work. She described the situation at work as follows:

There would be conversations in the office and you knew you were not supposed to be hearing this. They weren't thinking of you. They just overlook you completely. . . . And they have an attitude of: This little thing here behind the desk.

Further, Deb indicated that some of her supervisors did not follow office procedures. One supervisor addressed her by her first name but expected that she addressed him by his official title. There may have been other incidents that Deb might not have wanted to share. Taken together her interactions with her supervisors made Deb develop the meaning perspective that she is not okay, that she is "a little non-entity." She said:

You reach a point where you start to believe it. Well, they are better than I am. They do have all these degrees. They can do all these things. Well, okay, I am a little non-entity.

Deb mentioned that she enrolled in college because she felt bored at home during the summer months when she was laid off. Further she indicated that she was looking for an opportunity to prove herself, for a challenge after "something" in her life had "eased up." Deb did not want to specify what she meant by "something had eased up." In addition, Deb thought that she might be able to reestablish a positive sense of self by taking some classes and proving herself within the college environment. And in fact, college was able to meet this expectation as the following quote shows:

And it worked out well. At the end of my freshman year I was in the upper two percent of my freshman class. I put my certificate on the wall in my office. I framed it and hung it up. Okay, guys, read this.

Hence, receiving an award for her outstanding performance in her freshman year and obtaining good grades throughout her time in college gave Deb the perception that "she did it," that she proved that she is not a "non-entity." Deb mentioned:

And I decided I'm not this person that they led me to believe that I might be. I can be whatever I want to be. And maybe I should see what I want to be.

A social work class helped Deb to become aware of the meaning perspective that previously had hindered her from making changes in her life. In the social work class Deb learned about the culture of poverty. She learned

that people that grow up in a culture of poverty think that they cannot do anything to change their situation. Deb was able to recognize that she had held the same meaning perspective like people that grow up in a culture of poverty, namely, the meaning perspective that her current life circumstances are immutable and beyond her control.

And I think there is something to it that if you grow up in that environment, you start, after a while you start what I was doing. I started to believe that you can't do anything. And so I awakened up more to that, that I did too, that they are feeling exactly what I did. It's a different subject but it is the same what I did.

In conclusion, her college experience helped Deb to question her negative self-image and to free herself from it. She experienced emancipatory learning. After Deb was able to emancipate herself from the notion that she is a "non-entity" she tried to explore who she is or wants to be. She looked for role models in the literature she read and hoped to find helpful hints on how she could become like her role model.

And if you look back to these writers (American female writers) you are gonna find a role model somewhere in there, somebody who might help you over . . . something. I think literature is one way of looking at what is going on in women's minds, and maybe a way to find somebody that may provide guidance for what you are doing.

Deb can see part of herself in Scarlet O'Hara. Scarlet O'Hara is an "ornament," and Deb herself was raised to be an "ornament." For Deb the "perfect woman" is a combination of an "ornament" and a strong, self-confident person.

She (a female character in one of the books she read) was strong, very positive, very sure about what she wanted, very confident. . . . I think you envy somebody that is that sure in what they want. . . . And you read it, and you figure in there may be the clue to what you need to do. If you would take the strength of her character and Scarlet - Scarlet is an ornament - you get this perfect woman.

In conclusion, Deb seems to be working on a personal transformation. She tries to answer the questions: "Who should I be" and "How can I become who I should be." She hopes that reading literature by American female writers will help her to find answers to these questions. Deb realized that her parents raised her as an ornament and that this upbringing made her the person she is. Further, Deb managed to free herself from her negative self-image that she had developed at her work-place. Thus she engaged in emancipatory learning. It might be helpful for Deb to continue to explore who she is right now and what made her become who she is. According to transformative theory becoming aware of one's meaning perspectives, in this case Deb's perception of herself, and testing the validity of these meaning perspectives promotes personal transformation. Instead of looking for guidelines and "prescriptions" for becoming the "perfect" woman in sources outside herself Deb may want to explore and assess the qualities that made her the person she is,

Perspective transformations do not have to affect the total identity of the individual

Deb's interview provided evidence that Deb examined the meaning perspectives she held of herself during her time in college. It also provided evidence that Deb critically reflected on her religious meaning perspective and her meaning perspective on poor people. In a class on Greek mythology Deb noticed that there are commonalities among stories in Greek mythology and the Christian religion. This realization functioned as a trigger event. Deb started to question the meaning perspective that Christianity is the only religion, even more, it made her become doubtful of the idea of religion in general as the following quote shows.

There is a lot of parallels between the gods and goddesses and Jesus and Mary. . . . I think I don't believe. . . . Our religion is not the only religion because you can see the parallels. It is just a different culture. . . . They are not any different from what we are doing right now. . . . I started to question it years ago and seeing it all show up in the gods, it makes sense. It is a wonderful idea. And it would be nice if there is a heaven up there, and we are all around and having a good time. I guess I can't really buy into it.

Deb negated the meaning perspective that there is a God and life after death. She did not mention anything about a new meaning perspective that she adheres to. However, for a perspective transformation to be completed, Deb had to or will have to replace her old meaning perspective by a new one and act on it.

When sharing the change in her religious perspective, Deb did not mention any consequences that this change had on her self-image, on her meaning perspective on poor people, or on any other perspectives. She exclusively talked about her religious perspectives. Hence, it seems that she reflected on her religious perspectives as an entity separate from the other perspectives she held.

Another example that provides support for the hypothesis that meaning perspectives are negotiated independently from each other is Deb's transformation of her meaning perspective on poor people. Prior to enrolling in college Deb held the meaning perspective that many people who are poor are to be blamed for their own misery since they don't do anything to improve their situation. What made Deb develop this meaning perspective? Deb mentioned that her father taught in an inner city school when she was growing up. Thus she may have developed her former meaning perspective "Poor people are to be blamed for their own misery" during her childhood. However, no information was obtained in the interview that would provide a definite answer to the origin of this meaning perspective. Educational experiences in a social work class helped to evoke a disorienting dilemma in Deb and thus made her examine her former meaning perspective on poor people. In the social work class Deb learned about the reasons and circumstances for being poor. She learned about the factors that make it difficult for poor people to leave the cycle of poverty. Thus her social work class offered her an alternative meaning perspective for being poor. As a result she replaced her former meaning perspective "Poor people are to be blamed for their own misery" with the meaning perspective "It is difficult for poor people to improve their situation." Her new meaning perspective manifested itself in her actions: She made a charitable donation. The following quote may illustrate the perspective transformation that she experienced.

I took a social work class. And I learned about the culture of poverty, and if you are borne there, you have no aspirations. . . . It made me take a closer look at how I dealt with poor people. . . . In that class we talked

about people who are poor and some of them can't help it. There is a certain acknowledgment forced upon you. . . . And instead of looking at the undeserving poor now I think they are all deserving poor - they are not all but I tend to look at it more that way. . . . But it also forced me to change some things I did. Last year on Christmas there was a donation that was given in the boys name.

In the example above it was mentioned that Deb negotiated her religious perspectives separately from the other perspectives she held. This could also be observed in this example. Deb talked about her former meaning perspective on poor people, the way in which her social work class helped her to reflect on this meaning perspective, and her revised meaning perspective. When sharing this experience she did not mention any effects that negotiating her meaning perspective on poor people had on other perspectives she held. She only talked about her meaning perspective on poor people.

In conclusion, these two examples indicate that people negotiate one meaning perspective independently from other meaning perspectives. The transformation of one meaning perspective does not seem to influence the transformation of other meaning perspective one holds nor does it influence one's identity as a whole.

Not all perspective transformations affect the individual in the same way

The interviews with the female adult students demonstrated that during their time in college students may experience a transformation of meaning schemes or both a transformation of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Thus students may reflect on content and process only (transformation of meaning schemes) or on content, process *and* premises (transformation of meaning perspectives).

From the verbal and non-verbal expressions of the interviewees it could be concluded that a transformation of a meaning perspective is connected with more emotional upheaval than the transformation of a meaning scheme. Further, the verbal and nonverbal expressions of the interviewees indicated that some meaning perspectives are more significant to their sense of self than others. Negotiating meaning perspectives that are more significant to one's sense of self entails more inner tension than negotiating meaning perspective

that are less important for one's sense of self. The following examples may help to illustrate these findings.

Sally negotiated her meaning perspective on her self-image; that is, she negotiated a meaning perspective that is very significant to her sense of self. What was Sally's meaning perspective on her self-image prior to enrolling in college? And what made her develop this meaning perspective? Mezirow (1991) indicates that meaning perspectives are developed in emotionally charged relationships. This is true in Sally's case. During her childhood Sally had behavioral problems. Her parents and teachers scolded her for her behavior but did not deal with the underlying problem for her "misbehaving." As a consequence Sally developed the meaning perspective that she was a "bad" child since children that are punished must be "bad" children. Sally held that meaning perspective for a long time till she finally received some information in a class on special education that did not fit her meaning perspective. In the class she learned about children with behavioral problems. She realized that the symptoms these children demonstrate are the same she showed when she was a child. Further she learned that there are many children with such problems and that these children are not "bad" children but that they have problems that can be treated. This information did not coincide with her former meaning perspective that she was a "bad" child. The inconsistency between Sally's former meaning perspective of herself and the new information functioned as a "trigger" in her perspective transformation. It stimulated Sally to question the validity of her former meaning perspective; that is, Sally tested the arguments that made her believe that she was a "bad" child. By learning that she had behavioral problems that could and should have been treated Sally was able to identify her meaning perspective of being "bad" as unjustified. She replaced her meaning perspective of having been a "bad" child with the meaning perspective that she was a child with behavioral problems that could have been taken care of. This perspective transformation was emancipatory in that it freed Sally from the meaning perspective that she was a "bad" child and to look at herself and at her past in a new and more positive way. The following quote may help to illustrate the perspective transformation that Sally experienced.

Special education had a lot of meaning for me because I recognized myself in a lot of things . . . learning disabilities and that kind of thing, emotional disturbances and behavior problems that meant a lot to me because I could see myself in that even as a child. . . . I had a lot of problems in grade school. . . . And I thought I was the only one and I found out that this is an average thing. . . . It helped to put my perspective on it. And not just to forget it or to take it out of my life but to come to grips with certain things like about things in my past life. Through school I have been able to go on, not to keep wrapped up in the old stuff, looking at a future, being able to see the past, the pain. I think what education has done is to get past this stuff and see that things can be good. . . . Learning that this is not a problem I had but a situation I had. This is a condition you had. This is not something you had because you are bad or good. This is something that should be taken care of the right way. This is not something you should be kicked for.

However, some comments that Sally made show also that she has not yet completed the perspective transformation process. For example, she mentioned:

Cutting down on the self-blame. I still have a problem with that.

Further, Sally's example makes obvious that one educational experience can affect all three learning domains at the same time. In her special education class Sally learned how to recognize children with behavioral problems (instrumental learning) and how to communicate with them (communicative learning). In addition, the class stimulated Sally to examine her meaning perspective on herself (emancipatory learning). The class had a transformative effect on Sally because the class was dealing with issues that were of personal significance to her.

Her class in special education was one experience that stimulated Sally to reflect on her meaning perspective on her self-image. Another educational experience that made Sally reexamine her self-image was a class in world history, especially what she learned about the history of the Church. Since her childhood Sally had held the meaning perspective that the Church is perfect and that the Pope is perfect because this is what the nuns had told her in school. In addition the nuns had told her that since the Pope is perfect she has to be perfect too, and if she wasn't she would be "bad." The teacher of the world history class, on the other hand, described the Church in a quite different way. He talked about the corruption that existed in the Church. He mentioned many cases of

injustice that were committed in the name of the Church. Using different examples he showed that even many Popes were involved in wrong-doings. Thus this information was contradictory to Sally's former meaning perspective "The Church and the Pope are perfect" and stimulated her to examine and revise her meaning perspective.

What were the significant processes in this perspective transformation? First Sally became aware of the origin of her meaning perspective. She realized that some part of her feeling of being "bad" was due to her strict education in a Catholic school. The world history class provided her with a meaning perspective that was inconsistent with the meaning perspective that she held. This inconsistency represented a disorienting dilemma that stimulated Sally to examine her meaning perspective. She realized that her former meaning perspective "The Church and the Pope are perfect" was based on the mere statements of some nuns. The meaning perspective "The Church and the Pope are not perfect" that was offered in the world history class, on the other hand, was supported by historical documents. Hence, the new meaning perspective seemed to be more convincing to Sally. Consequently, she concluded that the information about the Pope and the Church that she had received as a child was distorted. She replaced her former meaning perspective "The Church and the Pope are perfect" with the meaning perspective offered in the world history class "The Church and the Pope are not perfect." Further she concluded that if the Church and the Pope are not perfect it is okay to make mistakes. Making mistakes does not mean that one is a "bad" person. The following quote expresses the perspective transformation that Sally experienced in her own words.

Religion is a big thing for me and we had that preached into us, a lot of fear about religion. I think that learning about true things and having big question marks answered like what were the real things that led up to the break-up of the Church. . . . Anything that I learned about the Church was wrong. We had a big thing about being perfect. We talked about the Pope and that he is so perfect. It gives you a feeling of being bad. I think that things were picked out for us, that everybody should go on a pedestal and be so perfect. . . . Learning about a lot of corruption in the Church. . . It is nice to learn that it is okay to make mistakes. I learned facts like what lead to the break-up of the Church. I think I had a real struggle between good and bad.

In conclusion, her class in special education and her world history class helped Sally to free herself from the meaning perspective that she is a "bad" person. Sally was involved in content, process, and premise reflection. She examined whether she was a "good" or "bad" child (content reflection), how she developed the perspective that she was a "bad" child (process reflection), and whether the arguments that made her believe that she was a "bad" child were justified (premise reflection). Since our self-image influences who we are as a person, it is justified to claim that Sally transformed a meaning perspective that is central to her identity.

An example of an interviewee that experienced the transformation of a meaning perspective that is not very significant to her sense of self is Kirsten. Prior to enrolling in college Kirsten held the meaning perspective that professors are more important and more valuable than other people.

When I was right out of high-school they (the professors) seemed like such authoritative figures. . . . I used to think they were above the rest of us.

Where did this meaning perspective originate from? Kirsten mentioned that she held this meaning perspective right after finishing high-school. Thus it may be that her interactions with her high school teachers instilled this perspective in her. However, this is only an assumption. Unfortunately, the interviewee was not asked about the origin of her meaning perspective "Professors are above the rest of us" in the interview. During her time in college Kirsten had experiences that did not fit this meaning perspective. She said:

I formed friendships especially with the ones at Marshalltown college - I formed friendships with them. I have seen them make mistakes. Now I realize you can talk to them and you can have friendships with them and stuff.

Thus her college experience as a whole functioned as a disorienting dilemma. Her educational experiences made her examine the meaning perspective she held of professors. She concluded:

These professors and stuff are just people, and I don't necessarily think of them as highly as I used to. I used to think they were way above the rest of us, and they are just people.

To sum up, Kirsten reflected what kind of meaning perspective she held of professors (content reflection) and whether this meaning perspective is justified (premise reflection). Kirsten liberated herself from the meaning perspective that professors are more important and more valuable than other people. However, her verbal and non-verbal expressions communicated that the meaning perspective on the status of professors was not as important to the identity of Kirsten as the meaning perspective on her self-image was to the identity of Sally.

Finally, Jackie serves as an example of a student reflecting on meaning schemes but not meaning perspectives. A short review on her years prior to enrolling in college may help to get a better understanding of Jackie. After her marriage Jackie stayed home. She kept house and took care of her four children. After the youngest had moved out of the house Jackie started to feel dissatisfied at home. She described her dissatisfaction as follows:

You kind of feel like the dummy at home. You are being left out. You feel like that you are just worthless, unvalued. You feel kind of empty. You feel like you are not contributing anything.

Jackie holds the meaning perspective "Society does not value homemakers." She mentioned repeatedly:

When you stay home society does not value you because you are just a housewife. The product that you produce in good kids is valued but you as a person are not valued because you are just a housewife.

Jackie indicated that she developed this meaning perspective from her interactions with other adults at social gatherings. She assumes that people at social gatherings would not talk to her if she would be *just* a housewife.

I notice when people ask me what I'm doing and I say: I'm a student. "Oh, you are a student. Isn't that interesting!" If I had said: "I'm just a housewife," they just pass over you as if you don't amount to anything even. . . . If I were to say "I'm just a housewife" I would be immediately passed over because you have no value. You are uninteresting. You are

unimportant. Well, we go on to somebody else who is making money because that is important.

In addition Jackie may have developed the meaning perspective "Society does not value homemakers" from interactions she had prior to enrolling in college. And since Jackie did not want to be *just* a housewife she enrolled in college. She is proud of herself now that she is close to completing her bachelor's degree. Thus her educational experiences helped Jackie to feel better about herself. During her time in college Jackie transformed some of her meaning schemes. For example, a political science class helped Jackie to revise her meaning schemes on the functioning of the American government. Jackie learned how to obtain and interpret certain statistics. Thus she engaged in instrumental learning. But her educational experiences did not help her to examine the validity of her meaning perspective "Society does not value homemakers." Jackie thinks that according to society homemakers are not valuable. And the opinion of society greatly influences her self-image. She seems to adhere to the following reasoning: If society does not value homemakers, then I'm not valuable if I'm a homemaker. Thus Jackie seems to adopt what she perceives as the opinion of society and makes it her opinion of herself. She does not examine the validity of the meaning perspective "Homemakers are not valuable." She does not identify the supporting arguments for this meaning perspective and test whether they are justified. In addition, what makes her so sure that the comments she heard at social gatherings are reflecting the opinion of the society? Further, could she not have misinterpreted these comments? In conclusion, her meaning perspective "Society does not value homemakers" limits Jackie's options and controls her life. It may be beneficial for Jackie to critically examine the premises behind her meaning perspective "Society does not value homemakers." It may be beneficial for Jackie's personal growth to reflect on whether society really does not value homemakers. And even if society does not value homemakers, it may be beneficial for Jackie's personal growth to reflect on whether the meaning perspective "Homemakers are not valuable" is also justified in her mind.

The female adult students reached different degrees of perspective transformation

In the literature review in the section "Mezirow's perspective transformation" it was described that the process of perspective transformation can be thought of as a continuum consisting of the following elements: becoming aware of the meaning perspective, questioning the meaning perspective, exploring alternative meaning perspectives, revising the meaning perspective, and acting on the new meaning perspective. The interviewees differed in the degree of perspective transformation that they experienced along this continuum. Some interviewees completed a perspective transformation; that is, they revised a meaning perspective and acted on it. Others experienced some elements of the transformative process but then, for some reason, were unable to move on in their transformative journey. Again, other interviewees did not even become aware of the meaning perspectives they held and thus did not start a perspective transformation at all.

Kathy is an example of a female adult student that completed a perspective transformation during her time in college. She examined her meaning perspective on her intellectual capabilities, revised it and acted on it. Prior to enrolling in college she had held the meaning perspective that she is not intelligent. She had developed this meaning perspective from comments that her mother and the men in her life had made. Due to her meaning perspective "I'm not intelligent" Kathy assumed that a two-year degree was all that she could expect of herself as far as college is concerned. Thus she enrolled in a two-year program. She said:

Well, when I first started I expected some easy hands-on training. I didn't want to study out of books because I didn't think that I could learn out of books. I didn't think I have the capacity. I went for a two-year degree in hotel and restaurant management at DMACC.

Contrary to her expectations she received very good grades and was one of the best students in her year. Her good performance in college did not fit her meaning perspective that she is not intelligent and incapable of obtaining a four-year degree. She described this experience as follows:

And then that first summer that I went to DMACC I got straight As. Well, then I started thinking, well, maybe I'm not so stupid after all.

The inconsistency between her college experience and her meaning perspective functioned as disorienting dilemma. It stimulated her to critically reflect on her meaning perspective that she is not intelligent. She reached the conclusion that her former meaning perspective of herself was distorted and replaced it with the new meaning perspective that she is capable of obtaining a four-year degree. Kathy acted on the new meaning perspective by changing her career plans from a two-year degree to a four-year degree.

When I found out that I can be good at this, that's when I started changing my career objectives from a two-year degree to a four-year degree. I showed her (her mother) and I showed the guys who said that I was so stupid, I'm not. And I showed myself too. And I think because of all this for any man to ever come in and try to tell me I'm stupid again I have the proof (her rewards) hanging on my kitchen wall. I'm not stupid. All my rewards and things. . . . I proved myself and anybody else - whoever doubted it - that I was capable of doing college work and that I wasn't a stupid person.

Kathy revised her meaning perspective on her intellectual capabilities and acted on it. Thus she completed a perspective transformation. But this does not mean that she will never again question her meaning perspective on her intellectual capabilities. People negotiate meaning perspectives throughout their lives. All this example shows is that Kathy completed one cycle of the process. She revised a meaning perspective and acted on it. Most female adult students that negotiated meaning perspectives at the time of the interview were not able to complete a cycle of perspective transformation. Many were aware of their meaning perspectives and were questioning them. However, they had not explored alternative meaning perspectives and had not revised their meaning perspectives. Ginny's case will serve as an example for this group. The meaning perspective that Ginny tries to negotiate centers on her relationship with her husband. Certain experiences prior to enrolling in college made Ginny aware that she is dependent on her husband and gave her the incentive to examine her relationship with her husband. These experiences, the triggers in Ginny's transformation process, were as follows:

Ginny's mother-in-law recommended the book "Widow" for her to read. This book deals with a woman that realizes how unprepared she is for the world as her husband dies. Ginny could identify herself with that woman. She became aware that she, too, is dependent on her husband. She said:

I'm not self-sufficient any more. That was the first time that I realized that and I was very frightened.

A friend of hers made her aware that she doesn't have her own opinions.

Do you know that whenever someone asks you about your opinion about something, you tell what your husband would think about it. And I had never noticed that. That was scary to realize that I wasn't thinking.

Once Ginny wanted to invite a female teacher from New York to her home. She had taken a course from this teacher. Her husband did not want the teacher to come to his house. This incident stimulated Ginny to examine her relationship with her husband. She realized that there were double standards in their relationship: She respected and fulfilled the wishes of her husband but her husband did not respect her wishes and feelings.

There was like a turning point for me - the sense of not accepting somebody I was excited about, for no reason. . . . And I realized he doesn't want me to have anything. . . . And I got a very strong message from that, and then I started to look at all the double standards in our relationship: "You have to leave me a note thing. But I don't leave no notes." . . . What you want is not important. How you feel is not important. The things that are important to you aren't important.

A friend of Ginny recommended a course in transactional analysis and a course in assertiveness. The course in transactional analysis helped her to examine her behavior. She learned to see and understand the reasons for what she is doing and thus to validate her behavior. Further, in the course in transactional analysis Ginny discovered that she is her own person.

I could understand why I do things, where I'm coming from and I think that was the turning point. . . . Transactional analysis was letting me know that there is something inside of me.

The course in assertiveness helped her to be firm in obtaining her goals. Prior to the course Ginny tended to put everybody else first. The assertiveness training let Ginny see that there are other options, that she can achieve her goals if she is persistent. Thus Ginny experienced a perspective transformation. Her perspective "I have to do what others want me to do" transformed into "I can stand up for my own ideas and desires." She expressed this perspective transformation with the following words:

Assertiveness, it presented power to me. I realized that just saying a few words nicely, it gave me power. And I grew up taking care of everybody. I didn't have to do that any more. I didn't even have to explain myself. I just had to say no. And if I wanted something and somebody was disagreeable, I just had to repeat what I wanted.

Her mother-in-law told her to learn from her husband how to complete the income tax return. Being able to manage this task provided Ginny with the incentive of gaining control and independence in other areas. Before Ginny learned how to complete the income tax return she held the perspective that she is incapable of doing things on her own. Her experience of being able to complete the income tax return did not fit this perspective. Thus Ginny started to question her self-image and to explore her capabilities.

Once I started doing that, it wasn't enough any more. I wanted a mind which I didn't have any more. I had given him my mind.

Ginny read "Reality Therapy" by Glaser. Her favorite phrase of the book became: "So what are the odds of that happening?" From then on every time she was afraid of doing something she said: "Well, what are the odds of that happening?" From the point of view of perspective transformation Ginny was examining her fear and assessing the supporting arguments for that fear. By doing this exercise Ginny realized that her fears were unjustified which in turn helped her to do the things that she was afraid of before.

Having become aware that she is dependent on her husband Ginny started looking for ways to break this dependency. She tried to be her own therapist by reading many psychology books:

Trying to break away from my family situation, trying to understand what was going on, who I was, why I was. . . . So I was reading all those textbooks.

Further, Ginny enrolled in college since she expected that the knowledge that she would acquire in college would help her to break away from her husband. She said:

I was a troubled person looking for a way out, and I have to understand first in order to get out. . . . Maybe school is going to give me freedom and I don't know whether it would be freedom from my husband or freedom from the chains that bound me - from the restrictions. . . . If I compared it with the search for God I guess I would think that people that have God are free - once they find him. Once I found whatever I was looking for I'm going to be free. . . . I really don't have the chains any more. Maybe if a person has an education they don't owe anybody anything. . . . If a person has an education they have determination, they are free. They can take care of themselves. It's about independence maybe. . . . When a person is codependent they don't think any more. They totally don't think. They shut their minds off, and they only think what the other person gives them. And to me that's what a codependent woman is, somebody that doesn't think. She just has feelings that he gives her, the thoughts he gives her to think. . . . A codependent woman, she is limited. The more she knows, her vision gets broader.

However, Ginny is so fixated on college and centers her whole life around college that it is questionable if her college experience helped her and will help her to critically reflect on her self-image and her relationship with her husband. Before going to college Ginny defined herself exclusively as mother and wife. Now that she is going to college she defines herself exclusively as a student neglecting her other roles instead of integrating the different roles with each other. The fulfillment and satisfaction Ginny was not able to obtain from her marriage and motherhood she now tries to receive from her college experience. She mentioned:

School is the only focus of my life, my goals, my dreams, my desires and everybody else must be on hold because I'm not giving it up. I felt better about it than about anything that I have done in my life. . . . School gives me something back; marriage, children there is no pay-back. . . . When

I'm in school I'm pursuing something for me. . . . It's the only meaningful time for me. . . . School is a wonderful rock in the middle and all these crises are going on and that rock is stable. . . . I don't look to my husband for stability. . . . (one semester when she didn't go to school): I wish I had been in school because what he was doing, didn't have as much impact as the loss I was receiving of me not being in school.

In conclusion, different experiences prior to enrolling in college helped Ginny to become aware of her dependency on her husband and to critically reflect on her situation. Becoming aware of one's situation or one's meaning perspective is a crucial element in the process of perspective transformation. However, Ginny was not able to progress any further on her transformative journey. Her educational experiences did not help Ginny to examine her relationship with her husband. Thus in contrast to Kathy, Ginny did not complete a perspective transformation during her time in college. However, it is possible that at a later point in time Ginny will be able to revise her meaning perspective on her relationship with her husband. Thus it seems that a meaning perspective can be temporarily interrupted or remain incomplete.

Perspective transformations can be triggered by educational and non-educational experiences

Ginny's example offers some further insights. Ginny's perspective transformation was triggered by experiences outside the educational setting. Ginny decided to go to college because she expected that college would help her to break away from her husband or, in other words, to facilitate her perspective transformation. The perspective transformations that were discussed in the examples above, on the other hand, were triggered by educational experiences in college; that is, not experiences prior to enrolling in college but alternative perspectives that were presented to them in college made them aware of their meaning perspectives and stimulated them to examine their meaning perspectives. Thus it can be concluded that perspective transformations can be evoked and facilitated by both experiences within the educational setting and experiences outside the educational setting.

The effect of educational experiences on the process of perspective transformation may be difficult to separate from the effect of non-educational experiences

Frances' case showed that in some cases it might be difficult to separate the effect of educational experiences on the perspective transformation process from the effect of other experiences in the life of the interviewee. Frances indicated that her college experience helped her to examine her relationship with her husband. College validated her as a person and helped her to realize that she has an identity separate from her husband. She expressed this as follows:

Oh, I think it probably definitely helped getting the enmeshment broken - get my codependency broken . . . because it validated me as a person so instead of thinking I was an extension of him I became my own person.

Frances may have identified herself with her husband because she was not comfortable with herself. A support group of friends and family members of alcoholics with whom she meets once a week helped her to accept herself and to be her own person.

It has taken me a long time to get comfortable with myself around other people. . . . I'm not the only one who feels that way and I think it is self-validating to hear other people's stories and know that people have felt the way you felt before, and you are not alone, and you are not strange. That helped me. That made me feel comfortable with myself.

Both experiences, her experience in college and her experience in the support group, seem to have helped her to examine her relationship with her husband and to critically reflect on her own identity.

Perspective transformations influence the emotional well-being of the female adult students

Many researchers (Ferguson, 1980; Brammer, 1981; Loder, 1981; Keane, 1985; Brookfield, 1987; Boyd & Myers, 1988) indicated that perspective transformations are periods of emotional upheaval. This finding could be supported by the results of this study. Several interviewees mentioned that they were experiencing tension, disorientation, and anxiety when negotiating perspectives. For example, Ginny mentioned that she was frightened when she

became aware that her husband was determining her life. Further Ginny indicated that the process of negotiating her meaning perspective on her relationship with her husband is connected with much emotional pain.

Female adult students that experienced stressful life events prior to enrolling in college were more likely to engage in transformative learning in college

Interviewees that had experienced stressful times during their childhood or the years immediately prior to enrolling in college seemed to be more likely to negotiate meaning perspectives central to their identity during their time in college. In their earlier lives these interviewees had developed distorted meaning perspectives in their relationships with significant others, such as their parents, husbands, teachers or supervisors. Their educational experiences helped them to become aware of their meaning perspectives and to free themselves from the distortions. For example, Sally had behavioral problems during her childhood and was punished by her parents and teachers for her "misbehaving." As a consequence, she developed the meaning perspective that she was a "bad" child. A special education class helped her to free herself from the meaning perspective that she was a "bad" child and to develop the meaning perspective that she was a child with behavioral problems that should have been treated. Comments of her mother and her former husbands made Kathy develop the meaning perspective that she is not intelligent. Her good performance in college helped her to free herself from that distorted meaning perspective. Similarly, educational experiences helped Deb, Lori, and Michelle to transform distorted meaning perspectives of themselves that they had developed during stressful time periods earlier in their lives. Jackie, Lisa, Mona, Rose, Pat, and Pam, on the other hand, did not mention stressful life events nor did their educational experiences seem to have triggered perspective transformations in them. In conclusion, it seems that life circumstances are more responsible for perspective transformations than are the educational experiences per se.

Educational experiences improved the self-image of the female adult students

Many interviewees mentioned that their educational experiences helped them to feel better about themselves, to become more confident, more tolerant, and more skeptical. These results support the findings of former studies. Hooper (1979), Lutter (1982), Smith and Regan (1983), and Meyer (1986) found

that the college experience helps women to gain a stronger self-confidence. Feldman and Newcomb (1969), Astin (1977), Bowen (1977), Strange and King (1981) and Leonetti (1990) indicated that seniors are more tolerant and critical than freshmen.

Belenky et al. (1986) studied women's experiences and problems as learners in general and their academic experiences in particular. They found that for growth to occur women need to know that they are capable of intellectual thought, they need to be confirmed in this knowledge, they need to feel accepted as a person, and they need to experience a sense of community. Many female adult students interviewed for this study mentioned that college helped them to feel better about themselves, validated their thoughts and opinions, and helped them to become more confident. Thus, college may indirectly contribute to the personal growth of the female adult students by providing them the support that is needed for personal growth to take place.

Enrolling in college is a way to make a positive change in one's life

Many interviewees were dissatisfied with parts of their life in the years immediately prior to enrolling in college. They were dissatisfied with their marriage, their work and/or their self-image. They considered enrolling in college as a way to make a positive change in their life. For some of them - Sally, Michelle, Deb, Kathy, Lori - college was able to free them from distorted meaning perspectives that are central to their identity and thus contributed to their personal growth. For other interviewees, however, college served more as an escape from dealing with their everyday problems than as a means for fostering their personal growth.

Summary of the Results

As described in the section on "Childhood experiences" and in the section on "Life experiences immediately prior to enrolling in college" most of the interviewees experienced stressful events or stressful time periods in their life before they enrolled in college: growing up in a dysfunctional family, difficult relationship with one parent or both parents, marital problems, death of spouse, illness or disability of family members, children leaving home, dissatisfaction with one's work situation, dissatisfaction with one's role as mother and

housewife, depression. Many interviewees are still trying to cope with the experiences they had in their earlier life. The majority demonstrate signs of low self-worth.

In their distress the interviewees decided to enroll in college. They expected that going to college would help them to improve their self-esteem, give their life a new focus and meaning, and give them a break from dealing with their problems. All interviewees indicated that they felt strongly about going to college but at the same time all of them were scared. They were worried whether they would still be able to learn, whether the traditional students would accept them, and whether they would be able to meet their family and academic obligations at the same time. Lack of time for family and for studying is the biggest concern of the female adult students. Nevertheless, the interviewees indicated that they study hard. Their academic endeavors seem to pay off. Most of them have very good grades and received awards for their outstanding performance. The interviewees indicated that their academic achievements helped them to feel better about themselves and increased their self-confidence. Further, the interviewees reported that they now feel more financially secure than before they enrolled in college since they expect that their degree will help them to get a good job. Some interviewees enjoyed being with the younger students. College validated their thoughts and provided them with an opportunity to prove themselves which, in turn, helped them to improve their self-image. In addition, college gave the interviewees new goals and a break from their everyday problems. During their time in college the interviewees were engaged in instrumental learning and in communicative learning. For example, Jackie learned how the American government functions (instrumental learning). Rose learned how to write a journal article (communicative learning). Instrumental and communicative learning were the kinds of learning that many interviewees expected to experience in college.

For some, however, college was able to do more. In addition to fostering their instrumental and communicative learning their educational experiences stimulated their emancipatory learning. Their educational experiences helped some interviewees to examine the meaning perspectives they held: perspectives of themselves, of their relationships with family members, of the role of females, and religious perspectives. The interviewees differed with regard to the degree

to which they completed their perspective transformation. Some individuals revised a meaning perspective and acted on the new meaning perspective; that is, they completed a perspective transformation. For example, her good performance in college helped Kathy to replace her former meaning perspective of not being able to get a four-year degree with the meaning perspective of being able to obtain a four-year degree in college. She acted on her new meaning perspective by switching from a two-year degree program to a four-year degree program. For other interviewees, their educational experiences helped them to become aware of their meaning perspectives. However, their educational experiences did not stimulate them to test the validity of their meaning perspectives. For other interviewees, attending college was meaningful only in the sense that the college degree will provide them with a better position in the job market. Thus there seems to be a continuum from female adult students that were able to transform some of their meaning perspectives due to their college experience to female adult students whose meaning perspectives remained "untouched" by their educational experiences. Female adult students that became aware of their meaning perspectives but failed to examine their validity and female adult students that became aware of their meaning perspectives and realized that their meaning perspectives are distorted but do not yet adhere to alternative meaning perspectives may be examples of the middle field in the continuum.

The perspective transformations that the interviewees were trying to negotiate can be differentiated according to the significance of the meaning perspective under examination. For example, Sally was able to revise her self-image, that is, a meaning perspective that is very important to her identity. Kirsten, on the other hand, revised her view on the authoritative position of professors, a meaning perspective that is less important to her identity.

Perspective transformations can be triggered by educational and non-educational experiences. For example, Ginny started to examine the meaning perspective on her relationship with her husband due to experiences she made outside the educational setting. She enrolled in college since she expected that college would help her to negotiate a perspective transformation; in her case, her perspective on her relationship with her husband. The other female adult students that were found to negotiate meaning perspectives did not enroll in

college with the intention to examine their meaning perspectives. Rather, educational experiences during their time in college stimulated them to reflect on their meaning perspectives. Further, the interviews did not reveal any indications that the educational experiences were designed with the purpose of assisting students in triggering or facilitating perspective transformations.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter what we learned about the research questions and what we learned about transformation beyond the research questions will be presented. At the end of this chapter recommendations for future research will be given.

Conclusions of the Study

In this section the following questions will be addressed. Were the educational experiences of the female adult students transformative experiences? What kind of educational activities were able to trigger and/or facilitate perspective transformations in the female adult students? What is the role of higher education in transformative learning? Is transformative learning limited to the educational setting? Is Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation able to explain the transformative experiences of the female adult students? What other insights in transformative learning were gained from the study? Did the interview itself have a transformative effect?

We have to keep in mind that the conclusions that will be presented in this chapter are based on interviews with a limited sample, limited in both the number of subjects and the variability of the subjects. Thus the conclusions that will be drawn pertain to the sample of this study. Future research is needed to examine whether the conclusions developed from this study can be generalized to a broader population.

Were the educational experiences of the female adult students transformative experiences?

The educational experiences of some female adult students were transformative whereas the educational experiences of others were not. Their educational experiences helped some female adult students to examine their meaning perspectives. These female adult students experienced emancipatory learning. They were able to free themselves from misconceptions and ideologies that restricted their options. For example, a special education class helped Sally to replace her meaning perspective "I was a bad child" with the meaning perspective "I was a child with behavioral problems that should have been

treated." However, many other female adult students that participated in this study experienced only instrumental and communicative learning. Their educational experiences helped them to learn how to do something and how to communicate more successfully but did not stimulate them to examine their meaning perspectives. How does the finding that educational experiences seemed to be able to trigger and/or facilitate a perspective transformation and thus personal growth in some interviewees but not in others compare to results of former studies? Feldman and Newcomb (1969) indicate that classroom and curricular experience do not significantly foster personal development of the students. The students seem to encounter difficulties relating their course work to the search for meaning in their lives. Becker (1968) found that students' academic life is dominated by obtaining good grades. The pressure for good achievements makes the students limit their academic endeavors to instrumental ways of learning. Tarule and Weathersby (1979), on the other hand, found that education can result in an inner transformation of values and assumptions. Thus, compared to the findings of former studies, the result of this study lends support to the statement by Tarule and Weathersby (1979). Educational experiences *can* trigger an examination of perspectives but do not necessarily do so. Besides the educational experience itself, other factors, such as the readiness of the student to engage in critical reflection may be important in determining whether an educational experience is able to trigger a perspective transformation or not.

Not all female adult students that became aware of their meaning perspectives during their time in college completed a perspective transformation, that is, were able to revise a meaning perspective and to act on the new meaning perspective. Some female adult students became aware of their meaning perspective and questioned it. However, for some reason, they were unable to move on in their transformative journey. Some of these students may be able to complete their interrupted perspective transformation at a later point in time.

Only one female adult student enrolled in higher education with the expectation that higher education would help her to facilitate a perspective transformation. This interviewee became aware of a distorted meaning perspective, her view of being dependent on her husband, prior to enrolling in college. She was hoping that college would help her to free herself from the

dependency on her husband. The other female adult students did not enroll in college with the expectation that college would facilitate a perspective transformation in them. Rather, educational experiences functioned as the triggering event in their transformative learning.

What kind of educational activities were able to trigger and/or facilitate perspective transformations in the female adult students?

Feldman and Newcomb (1969) found that extracurricular activities were more likely to promote personal development than educational activities within the classroom. Almost all female adult students that were interviewed for this study mentioned that they did not have time to participate in extracurricular activities. Thus the transformative potential of extracurricular activities could not be assessed in this study.

Educational activities within the classroom setting that were able to trigger perspective transformations in the female adult students interviewed for this study had the following characteristics: they provided the female adult students with alternative meaning perspectives to the ones that they held, they were related to some aspect of a pressing, personal concern. Transformative educational experiences offered the interviewees the opportunity to look at a pressing, personal concern from a different point of view. This finding supports the results of a study by Weathersby (1980) who states: For a perspective transformation to occur within the academic setting, there has to be "an interaction between personal concerns, which have immediacy in students' life experience, and a disciplined thought process, which allows individuals to step outside of their experience and rename it" (p. 21). Providing an alternative perspective on an issue that is of personal significance to the student can evoke a disorienting dilemma in the student. And a disorienting dilemma or triggering event was found to be crucial for initiating the perspective transformations that were reported by the female adult students in this study as well as for evoking the perspective transformations that were described by subjects of former studies.

In this study, subject matters pertaining to the social sciences were more likely to stimulate transformative learning than subject matters of the "hard" sciences. More specifically, the educational activities that were of

transformative nature were offered within the following subject matters: English, religious studies, speech and communication, sociology, social work, anthropology, women's studies, education, and history. Thus it seems that social sciences offer more potential for emancipatory learning than "hard" sciences. The educational activities provided in classes dealing with "hard" sciences are designed to foster instrumental learning, the learning of how to do something and how to perform. However, even educational activities in the social sciences classes may be aimed at promoting instrumental learning. Only, the nature of the subject matter may make it more likely that alternative perspectives on issues that are of personal significance to the students are presented and thus emancipatory learning is encouraged.

The teaching technique that was used to provide alternative meaning perspectives to the female adult students did not influence the transformative potential of the educational activity. The crucial point is that an alternative meaning perspective was offered up for examination. Theoretically, it is important that a person participates in public discourse since it provides the individual with the opportunity to externalize his/her meaning perspective and to discuss the supporting arguments of his/her meaning perspective and the supporting arguments of alternative meaning perspectives. Mezirow (1990) and Brookfield (1987) recommend activities that can promote the public discourse such as critical questioning, criteria analysis, critical incident analysis, and critical debate. In this study public discourse did not stand out as a significant instrument for fostering perspective transformation. However, this does not mean that public discourse did not take place. The female adult students may not have reported the public discourse they experienced. For example, they may have mentioned in the interviews that they received an alternative meaning perspective in the form of a lecture but may not have indicated in the interviews that they discussed this new meaning perspective with friends and family members.

Not only specific educational activities but the educational experience in college as a whole can have a transformative effect on the student. The unexpected success in college stimulated several interviewees to revise their meaning perspective on their self-image. For example, prior to enrolling in college Kathy held the meaning perspective that she is not intelligent. She had

developed this meaning perspective based on comments that her mother and the men in her lives had made. Her good performance in college stimulated her to negate her former meaning perspective and to replace it by the meaning perspective that she is intelligent.

What is the role of higher education in transformative learning?

In the "Introduction" chapter it was mentioned that the mission of higher education is often described as promoting growth and development of the learners. According to Mezirow (1991) development refers to the progressively enhanced capacity to critically reflect on one's meaning perspectives and to act upon the resulting insights. If one adheres to Mezirow's (1991) definition of development the task of higher education is to facilitate perspective transformation in the students. Is higher education fulfilling this task? In this study it was found that educational activities were able to facilitate perspective transformations in some female adult students but not in others. This finding indicates that other factors, especially the readiness of the student to engage in critical reflection is equally important for transformative learning to take place as the educational activities per se. The student is responsible for his/her learning. The student cannot be forced to become aware of his/her meaning perspectives nor can he/she be forced to revise his/her meaning perspectives. Examining one's meaning perspectives is a decision made out of free will. What higher education can and should do to fulfill its mission of fostering the personal development of the students is to provide the students with opportunities to become aware of their meaning perspectives, to question their meaning perspectives, to consider alternative meaning perspectives, and to act on the insights gained from this critical reflection process. In the section above it was discussed that educational activities that offer alternative meaning perspectives on issues that are of personal significance to the female adult students were able to trigger perspective transformations. To know which issues are of personal significance to the student, the teacher has to identify the reasons that made the student enroll in higher education in general and in a certain course in particular. Further, the teacher may help the students address issues that are important to them by designing educational activities and projects in cooperation with the students. Issues that seem to be important for a number of students

could be dealt with in a group setting. Issues that seem to be significant for one student alone could be addressed by means of an independent study. For example, many female adult students that were interviewed for this study mentioned that enrolling in college and being in college caused some internal conflict and tension within them. On the one hand, they wanted to go to college to do something for themselves. On the other hand, they felt guilty about being less available for their family. This conflict and inner tension remained throughout their years in college. Hence, integrating family responsibilities with college responsibilities and later with work responsibilities represents an issue that higher education has to address if its intention is to foster the personal growth and development of the students. But is higher education really interested in fostering personal growth and development? Is higher education interested in promoting emancipatory learning? Currently, most educational activities in higher education are designed with the intention to foster instrumental learning. The perspective transformation that some female adult students experienced within the educational setting seem to have occurred more accidentally than intentionally. Higher education may have offered activities like public discourse, brainstorming, or critical incident analysis to promote instrumental or communicative learning and not transformative learning. Educational activities may not be designed with the intention to foster transformative learning since the administrators, staff and faculty of the institution may adhere to a philosophy of education that does not regard fostering personal growth and development as a mission of higher education. Or, the educators may not agree with Mezirow's (1991) definition of growth and development. Thus identifying the philosophical orientation of an institution may be the first step in assessing if an educational institution is fostering personal growth and development as defined by Mezirow (1991).

Is transformative learning limited to the educational setting?

Transformative learning is not limited to the educational setting. Several female adult students shared perspective transformations that were triggered by experiences outside the educational setting. For example, a conversation with the owner of one of the major airlines in the United States functioned as a disorienting dilemma in a perspective transformation that Lori experienced.

When she was growing up her parents had instilled in her the meaning perspective that rich people and doctors are more important than other people. The fact that the owner of one of the biggest airlines, a presumably rich person, treated her as equal made her replace her former meaning perspective by the meaning perspective that all people are equal.

Is Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation able to explain the transformative experiences of the female adult students?

Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation is able to explain some dimensions of the transformative experiences of the female adult students but neglects others. One strength of Mezirow's theory is that it differentiates between instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning. Instrumental and communicative learning refers to the transformation of meaning schemes (reflection on content and processes) and emancipatory learning refers to the transformation of meaning perspectives (reflection on premises). In this way, Mezirow's theory is comprehensive; that is, it is able to capture all the experiences that were reported by the female adult students.

All interviewees that reported transformative experiences mentioned that their transformative learning was initiated by an inconsistency between a perspective they had held and an event they had experienced. Mezirow (1991) refers to this inconsistency as a disorienting dilemma. Many interviewees that experienced such an inconsistency indicated that it stimulated them to think about their previous perspectives. Some of them mentioned that they tried to remember when and under which circumstances they had developed this perspective. They assessed whether the arguments that supported their previous perspective were justified. If they decided that their old perspective was not justified, they were looking for new perspectives. Finally, they revised their old perspective taking into consideration what their new experience had taught them. They based their future decisions and actions on the revised perspective. The interviewees did not always describe their transformative experiences as explicit and clearly as it is presented here. However, the stories that the interviewees shared reflected the elements of Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation: becoming aware of the context and origin of one's meaning perspectives, questioning one's meaning perspectives, exploring

alternative meaning perspectives, revising one's meaning perspective and acting upon the insights gained from the critical reflection process. Mezirow (1991) asserts that transformative learning is emancipatory in that it frees the individual from misconceptions and ideologies that restrict his/her options. This liberating effect of transformative learning could be identified in the transformative experiences of the female adult students. The interviews developed their meaning perspective during their childhood or in interactions with their spouses. This finding supports Mezirow's (1991) assumption that meaning perspective are developed in emotionally charged relationships with significant others. In conclusion, Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation is able to explain significant elements of the transformative experiences of the female adult students, particularly the elements that deal with the cognitive, rational dimension of perspective transformation.

Educational activities in higher education are designed to foster rational, cognitive learning processes. For this reason, it was assumed that the transformative experiences of the female adult students would consist of cognitive, rational processes, and thus Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation may be apt to capture the transformative experiences. The interviews with the female adult students, however, showed that emotions, feelings, and images play a significant role in transformations, even in transformations that take place in settings emphasizing rational, cognitive learning. Mezirow (1991) indicates that negotiating meaning perspectives is accompanied by emotional upheaval and inner tension. However, when describing the process of transforming meaning perspectives Mezirow (1991) focuses exclusively on rational, cognitive elements neglecting the extrarational elements, that is, the feelings, images, and emotions. A formulation of transformative theory that puts a strong emphasis on the extrarational side is Boyd and Myers' (1988) transformative education. For this reason, Boyd and Myers' (1988) framework may be more powerful for explaining the transformative experiences of the female adult students. Boyd and Myers (1988) distinguish three major elements in transformative education: receptivity, recognition, and grieving. Receptivity means to be open to whatever surfaces from the "deeper" structures within ourselves. Recognition means to acknowledge these experiences as authentic or genuine. Grieving refers to the

dialogue between the intra-psychic structures and the ego. The critical phase is the grieving stage and if "managed successfully" transforms the individual into a more integrated and holistic person. Four phases can be distinguished in the grieving stage: numbness and panic, pining and protest, disorganization and despair, and restabilization and reintegration. The inner struggle that is characteristic of the grieving process could be identified in many interviews. The grieving stage captures the emotions and feelings very well that were essential to the transformative learning of the female adult students. For this reason, Boyd and Myers' (1988) transformative education may have been a better framework to use to explain the transformative experiences of the female adult students.

What other insights in transformative learning were gained from the study?

Based on what was learned from this study about the process of transformation, a new dimension may be added to Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation. Mezirow (1991) distinguishes between meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. A meaning scheme represents a specific knowledge, belief or assumption. Meaning perspectives are the habitual expectations and assumptions that represent an orienting frame of reference which people use to interpret and evaluate the meaning of experiences. All meaning perspectives and meaning schemes of an individual taken together can be thought of as identity of the individual. Meaning perspectives can be considered to be more central to the identity of the individual than meaning schemes. Further, the results of the study indicated that the meaning perspectives themselves differ in their centrality or significance to the identity of the individual. Figure 2 may help to illustrate this concept. The shaded area represents the identity of the individual. The concentric circles refer to different levels of centrality of meaning perspectives and meaning schemes. Since meaning perspectives are more significant to the identity of the individual, they are located in the center of the circle. The more distant a perspective is from the center, the less crucial it is to the identity of the individual. Meaning schemes are considered less significant to the identity of the individual and therefore are at the margin of the shaded area.

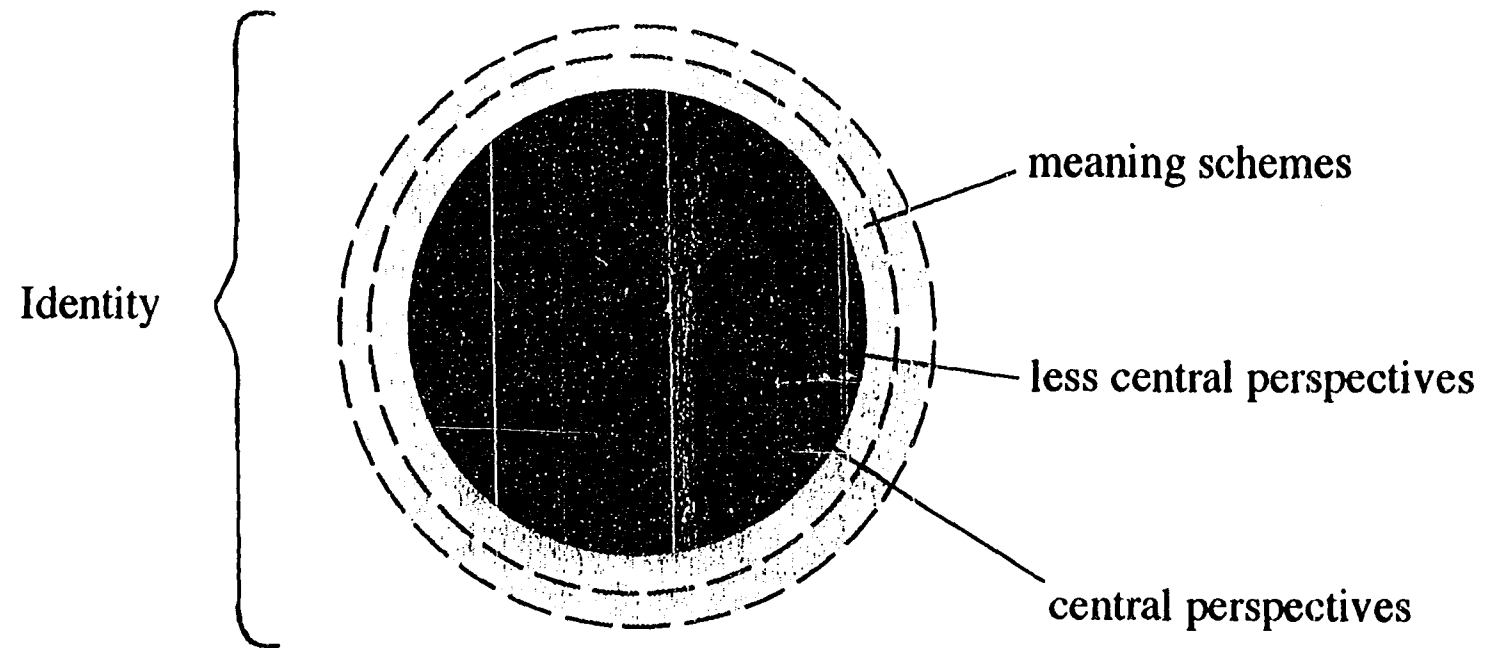


Figure 2: Identity model

Since meaning perspectives are more central to the identity of the individual than meaning schemes, the transformation of meaning perspectives causes more emotional upheaval and has more impact on the life of the individual than the transformation of meaning schemes. Further, the more central a meaning perspective is to the identity of an individual, the more painful is its transformation. Expressed in terms of the model in Figure 2, the interrupted lines of the "meaning scheme area" indicate that meaning schemes can be changed easier than meaning perspectives. Further, a transformation of a meaning perspective close to the center of the identity of the individual is more emotionally challenging and has more impact on the life of the individual than the transformation of a meaning perspective distant from the center.

Meaning perspectives that were found to be central to the identity of the female adult students interviewed for this study were perspectives involving the individual's self-concept, perspectives on the role of women, perspectives on relationships, and religious perspectives. As it has been mentioned in the literature review, Belenky et al. (1986) and Miller (1986) found that women define themselves not through their own activities and achievements but through those of their significant others, especially those of their husbands and children. Thus the result of this study that perspectives on relationships are central to the identity of women supports Belenky et al.'s (1986) and Miller's (1986) finding. The fact that some female adult students examined meaning perspectives that are central to their identity supports the finding of former studies that women use the college experience to rework identity issues, that is, to find answers to questions like: Who am I? What do I do with my life? (Letchworth, 1970; Brandenburg, 1974; Badenhop & Johansen, 1980; Hetherington & Hudson, 1981; Meyer, 1986).

The transformation of meaning perspectives, especially of central meaning perspectives affects the identity of the individual. Some part of the identity of the individual is changed. This internal change was made consciously. The individual decided to replace one meaning perspective by another meaning perspective since he/she concluded that the new meaning perspective represents a more appropriate basis for his/her decisions and actions. The internal change is irreversible. Once the individual transformed a meaning perspective his/her way of being in the world is different. The individual cannot move back to the

old state of being but only move forward. Every state of being is only temporary. A new experience that does not fit the individual's current meaning perspective may stimulate him/her to examine his/her meaning perspectives again. In conclusion, Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation helps to understand the process through which people change throughout their lives. It helps to understand in which way life experiences influence the identity of an individual. However, the explanatory power of Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation is limited to illuminating the cognitive, rational processes of transformation. The theory of perspective transformation does not explain the extrarational processes in transformation, that is, the processes that involve feelings, emotions, and images.

Did the interview itself have a transformative effect?

The interviewees were asked what was going on in their mind during the interview to assess whether the interview had a transformative effect on the female adult students. Some interviewees indicated that they were "just trying to answer the questions." Some were concerned about answering the questions "correctly." Other interviewees mentioned that the questioning stimulated them to reflect on issues in their life that they hadn't thought about for a long time or that they had never thought about before. For example, one interviewee said: "I suppose it really made me stop and think. I had to identify exactly what it is that I now know about myself." Some interviewees mentioned that the interview helped them to explore their thoughts and feelings. Both of them indicated that the questioning helped them to better understand their motivations for enrolling in college. One interviewee indicated that the interview had "therapeutic" value for her since she was able to share frustrations in her life.

Most of the interviewees mentioned that they were exhausted after the interview because it demanded a great deal of concentration to reflect on the questions and answer them. For example, one interviewee indicated: "I felt exhausted when you got done with me. I felt like it was real deep searching. It wore me out."

In conclusion, the interviews stimulated the female adult students to examine issues in their lives they had not thought of before. Further, the questions made the interviewees explore the meanings they attributed to their

college experience. In this way, the questions helped them to reflect on the relationship between their educational experiences and their personal lives. Thus the interviewing process seems to be at least partly responsible for the evidence of transformative learning that could be identified in the interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

The sample of this study was limited to female adult students that met the following criteria: born and raised in the United States, in their senior year, married or formerly married, have children, and are working on their first undergraduate degree. In a future study a different sample could be used to identify whether the results obtained in this study are specific to female adult students or whether they can be generalized to a broader group of students.

In this study individual interviews were carried out with the subjects of the sample. In a future study it may be investigated whether group interviews may be able to generate more or different information with regard to the research topic examined in this study.

A perspective transformation is a process that may occur over a long period of time. Processes and changes over time are to be studied best by using longitudinal research methods. For example, students could be interviewed from time to time during their years at college to assess the ongoing change in the meaning perspectives of the students. Due to financial and time restrictions a cross-sectional research approach had to be chosen for this study. A future study using longitudinal methods could improve the results of the study and provide new insights on the process of perspective transformation.

Future research may focus on the following questions: Under what circumstances is it likely that a perspective transformation is completed and under what circumstances is it likely that a perspective transformation remains incomplete or is interrupted for a certain time? What kind of perspective transformations have a significant impact on the identity of the individual?

It was mentioned that educational experiences seem to trigger and facilitate perspective transformations in some students but not in others. This finding raises many other questions such as: What factors have to be present and what conditions have to be met for a perspective transformation to occur? Are some individuals more likely to experience a perspective transformation

than others due to personality factors? Is the personality of the individual or the educational experience the crucial factor for initiating a perspective transformation? If so, what kind of educational experience is able to trigger or facilitate a perspective transformation? Is there a "right combination" between individual and educational experience; that is, a certain educational experience may be able to trigger or facilitate a perspective transformation in one individual but not in another? And what kind of educational experience is able to trigger the examination of what kind of perspective? These are some questions that may be worth exploring in future studies.

In addition, Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation neglects the emotional side of the transformative process. In future studies other theoretical frameworks such as Boyd and Myers' (1988) transformative education could be investigated for its explanatory power or new frameworks for explaining the process of transformation could be developed.

In conclusion, future research may focus on both developing a stronger theoretical basis for explaining the process of transformation as well on examining educational activities that may be able to trigger and facilitate the transformative process. Providing the students with opportunities to examine their meaning perspectives is necessary for higher education to meet its mission of facilitating the growth and development of the students.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

- Please think back to the time before you came back to school. What was going on in your life at that time? What was going on in your family? What was going on at work?
- What made you decide to come back to school?
- When you told your family, your friends, and/or your supervisor at work that you are going back to school how did they react?
- You told me that you are majoring in What made you choose this major? When you decided on your major did you also consider any other majors?

If the respondent indicated that she had considered other majors I asked her: What other majors did you consider? What made you consider these other majors? Why did you decide on your current major instead of the other ones? Was there anyone who influenced your choice of major? Was there any event or any experience that influenced your choice of major?

- At the time you entered Iowa State what were your future goals? What were your goals regarding your professional life? What were your goals regarding your private life?
- Let us now move on to the time when you enrolled in school and you had your first classes. Please think back to the first few days at Iowa State. Think back to your first days in class. What were these classes like for you? How did it feel for you to sit in the classes? What kind of experiences stood out for you as you took your first classes? What other experiences at the university were important for you during your first days at college? I'm thinking of experiences outside the classroom such as conversations with other students or university staff, attending cultural events, participating in student groups, work-study.
- During your first semester at Iowa State what was going on at home? Were your interactions and relationships with your family and friends different from the time before you entered Iowa State? If so, in which way were they different?
- During your first semester at Iowa State what was going on at work?
- You mentioned earlier that as you entered Iowa State your future goals were to At the end of the first semester were your future goals any different from the future goals you had as you entered Iowa State?

- What was the second semester like? Did you feel any different about being in school? Were there any experiences which made school meaningful to you? Please think of experiences inside and outside the classroom. Can you describe these experiences?
- What was going on at home during the second semester? Were your interactions and relationships with your family and friends any different from the first semester?
- Were there any changes in your future goals? If there had been changes I asked: What were these changes? What influenced you to make these changes?
- Many students have classes they like particularly. You took many classes during the last few years. Please think back to these classes. Were there any classes which were particularly meaningful to you? If the respondent answered yes, then I asked: Please reflect a little more on these classes. Why were these classes special for you? What made these classes different from the other classes you took?
- Were there any classes you did not like particularly? What was it about these classes that you did not like?
- Now we talked about some of your experiences in the classroom. Let us now talk some more about experiences outside the classroom that were meaningful to you. As I mentioned before I'm thinking of conversations with other students, university staff, attending cultural events and other events at the university, participating in student or campus organizations, lectures outside the classroom, conferences. What were some of the out-of-class experiences that were particularly meaningful to you? What was it about this experience that made it so meaningful to you?
- Now you are a senior. You have almost completed your bachelor's degree. Was and is the last year in college any different from the first years?
- What was and is going on at home during this last year? Are your interactions and relationships with family and friends any different from the first semesters at Iowa State?
- When you think back over the years you spent at Iowa State, in which ways do you feel they affected your life?

- What did you learn about yourself as a result from coming back to school?
How did coming back to school affect your personal growth?
- How did your return to school affect your relationships with people you are close to?
- What do you plan on doing after you graduate? How did you get interested in this? What are your plans for your private life? In which way are your future goals connected with the experiences you had at college?
If the future goals the respondent indicated at this time were different from the future goals she indicated for the time after the second semester I continued: Earlier you mentioned that at the end of your second semester your future goals were Now, you say that your future goals are What made you change your goals for the future?

APPENDIX B. CONSENT FORM

TITLE: EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF ADULT STUDENTS

PURPOSE: To gather in-depth data on the educational experiences of adult students (undergraduate students of 25 years of age and older) at Iowa State University.

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR: Renate Vogelsang

NAME OF RESPONDENT: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

The main purpose of the interviews is to gather in-depth information on your educational experiences at Iowa State University. I'm interested in learning which educational experiences have been meaningful to you and why.

The data collection will consist of two sessions. Today, I will be asking you some questions about your educational experiences at Iowa State University. At the second session, we may further explore some of these experiences. In addition, I may ask you for clarification regarding the information you are going to share with me today and for verification of the findings of the first session. Each interview will take about two hours.

Interviews can be interventions. An interview may make you reflect on thoughts, feelings, knowledge and experiences and thus lead you to find out things about yourself you haven't been aware before.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may decide not to participate at any time. The information you give me is confidential and will only be used for research that I'm conducting for my dissertation. No individual's name or any other identifying information will be used in any presentation of the findings. I hope you will be willing to answer all the questions, but if there are any you would rather not answer, just tell me.

I would also like your permission to audio tape the interview. This helps me keep an accurate record of your thoughts and experiences. Your name will not appear on the tape recording or any transcription of the recording. At any time during the interview, if you do not wish the audio tape to record what you are saying, just let me know. The tapes will be erased as soon as the interviews are transcribed.

Informed Consent for Research

I have read the description of the research study. I have also talked it over with the researcher to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I know enough about the purpose, methods, risks and benefits of the research study and I'm willing to participate in it.

Date: _____

Signature: _____